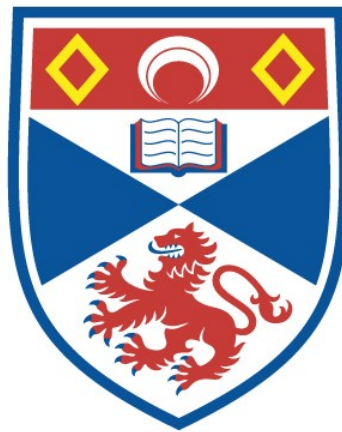


GENRE MEMORY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY  
AMERICAN WAR FILM : HOW POST-9/11 AMERICAN  
WAR CINEMA REINVENTS GENRE CODES AND  
NOTIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

John Trafton

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**Genre Memory in the Twenty-First Century American War Film:  
How Post-911 American War Cinema Reinvents Genre Codes and  
Notions of National Identity**



John Trafton

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Centre for Film Studies

School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies

University of St. Andrews  
St. Andrews, United Kingdom

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis, I argue that twenty-first century American war films are constructed in dialogue with the past, repurposing earlier forms of war representation by evoking the visual and narrative memory of the past that is embedded in genre form—what Mikhail Bakhtin calls 'genre memory.' Comparing post-9/11 war films with Vietnam War films, my project examines how contemporary war films envision war's impact on culture and social space, explore how war refashions ideas about race and national identity, and re-imagine war's rewriting of the human psyche. My research expands on earlier research and departs from traditional approaches to the war film genre by locating the American Civil War at the origin of this genre memory, and, in doing so, argues that nineteenth century documentation of the Civil War serves as a rehearsal for the twentieth and twenty-first century war film. Constructed in explicit relation to the Vietnam film, I argue that post-9/11 war films rehearse the history of war representation in American culture while also emphasizing the radically different culture of the present day. Rather than representing a departure from past forms of war representation, as has been argued by many theorists, I show that contemporary American war films can be seen as the latest chapter in a long history of reimagining American military and cultural history in pictorial and narrative form.

## Introduction

### **The post-9/11 war film and issues of genre memory**



Fig. 1. Urban combat, a feature of post-Cold War combat, informs scenes of warfare in both non-war films, Michael Mann's *Heat* (above left), and in war films, Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* (above right).

In a key scene in Michael Mann's *Heat* (Warner Brothers, 1995), bank robber Chris Shiherlis (Val Kilmer) battles his way through the streets of Los Angeles, automatic weapon in hand, trapped between two advancing police teams. Chris, taking cover behind a car, fires at the police in front of him, turns around to fire at the police pursuing him, turns around to fire again in front of him, drops down behind the car to load a new magazine, and then emerges to continue firing (Fig. 1, left). Although Mann's film stands firmly in the crime-thriller genre, his use of certain cinematic techniques in the scene is similar to many war films of the post-9/11 period. The use of (shaky) hand-held cameras, point-view-shots that assume the perspective of a weapon finding a target, jump cuts, and a combining of slow-motion and normal speed shots are a few of the formal techniques used in this scene that will later appear in Iraq War films and films concerning other contemporary conflicts.

Six years later, Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* (DreamWorks, 2001) featured sequences of urban combat (Fig. 1, right), shot with hand-held cameras, which appear

to be a hybrid of urban combat films and the war films of the 1990s (Spielberg's 1998 film *Saving Private Ryan* and David O'Russell's 1999 film *Three Kings*). Scott's film, originally slated for an early 2002 release, was rushed through post-production after the events of September 11, 2001, as it became clear that a new historical context demanded that the film be seen earlier, in order to be more relevant to a new public discourse that was underway. Strikingly, it is the urban combat film that offered the most salient intertext for Scott's film. As one of the earliest post-9/11 American war films, *Black Hawk Down* is indicative of two critical aspects in post-9/11 war cinema: the recoding of an earlier visual language and a dialogue with an American mythology being rewritten during the aftermath of September 11, 2001. These two aspects exhibited in Scott's film provide the starting point for this thesis, which examines how the post-9/11 American war film has reinvented the war film form.

Contemporary war films have reinvented themselves through genre memory, a notion described by Mikhail Bakhtin: genres, including and especially those connected to the war film, change slightly with each use, remembering past usage while at the same time acquiring new modes of expression drawn from the present (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Twenty-first century war cinema simultaneously remembers past modes and incorporates contemporary discourse and new aesthetic codes in order to distinguish itself from past modes. An important component of Bakhtin's theory of genre memory, one that is highly applicable to film analysis, is the concept of "double-voicing." When a film is double-voiced, rather than single-voiced, it simultaneously depends on and violates genre norms (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Double-voicing is evident in a war film when it evokes past war films while at the same time speaking



clearly about war from the perspective of the time of the film's production (Burgoyne 2008, 58). Robert Burgoyne notes that war films "set up a complex dialogue between the sedimented memories of history and nation preserved in...genre forms" and "appeal to new forms of social coherence...shaped by the rhetoric, imagery, and genre patterning of what might well be called war myths of the national past" (Burgoyne, 2010, 7). Every film discussed in the following chapters is double-voiced in different ways, remembering the past but reflective of the present.





Fig.2 Haunting in the war films of Samuel Fuller: Gene Evens wanders, dying from a head wound, like a zombie through the smoke in Samuel Fuller's *The Steel Helmet* (Lippert Pictures, 1951) (above); the opening shot from Fuller's *The Big Red One* (United Artists, 1980), the film's prologue set in World War I, evoking the haunting landscapes of Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Universal Pictures, 1930) (below).

To demonstrate how double-voicing operates in the war film, let's consider the work of Samuel Fuller. Fuller's *The Steel Helmet* (Lippert Pictures, 1951), set during the Korean War, borrows the tropes and conventions of the World War II combat film, in particular the convention of the diverse unit (an African American soldier and a Japanese American soldier are present). In the film, a captured North Korean soldier berates the minority servicemen for fighting for a country that oppresses them. Here Fuller injects the ideas put forth in the growing Civil Rights movement as a way of reorienting a familiar genre form, something that will be further explored in films such as John Irvin's Vietnam War film *Hamburger Hill* (RKO, 1987) and Spike Lee's *Miracle at St. Anna* (Touchstone Pictures, 2008). Samuel Fuller's World War II film *The Big Red One* (United Artists, 1980) explores the notion of haunting in war, using ghostly landscapes to convey that what dies on the battlefield never truly stays buried, a motif also used in *The Steel Helmet* (fig.2) and evoked by the battlefield haunting in films such as Lewis Milestone's World War I film *All Quiet on the Western Front*

(Universal Pictures, 1930) and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (United Artists, 1979). *The Big Red One* also evokes the memory of World War II through "the lens of Holocaust remembrance," much in the way that Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (Dreamworks, 1998) would do eighteen years later (Burgoyne 2008, 50); the combat unit of *The Big Red One* liberate a concentration camp, confronting the horrors of Hitler's genocidal machine. Though Fuller's work is not explored in this thesis, his work nevertheless provides an interesting case study in how war films are double-voiced; war films remember past genre conventions and draw on the resources of the present to dramatize anew either the past or unfolding historical events.

In this thesis, I will explore how twenty-first century American war films are constructed through Bakhtin's notion of genre memory. Through comparing post-9/11 war films with Vietnam War films, my thesis will examine how contemporary war films perform critiques of foreign policy, analyze war's impact on culture and social space, explore how war refashions ideas about race and national identity, re-imagine war's rewriting of the human psyche, and write a history of war to either complement or counter the official record. Genre memory, I argue here, precedes the advent of the war film itself, as the photographic and epistolary history that emerged with the American Civil War served as a precursor to the twentieth and twenty-first century war film.

The contemporary war films that I analyze, such as *Redacted*, *In the Valley of Elah*, and *The Hurt Locker*, remember the Vietnam War films, the films of World War II and World War I, and even pre-cinema modes of war representation, even if the only purpose of doing so is to subvert these past genre conventions. In this thesis, I will

pair one post-9/11 war film with one Vietnam War film in each chapter, as post-9/11 war films employ genre memory in a way that is similar to the Vietnam War films. Vietnam War films and contemporary war films both remember the past and use the resources of the genre in a new way.

My reason for designating war films released after the events of September 11, 2001 as “contemporary war films” is best explained by E. Ann Kaplan’s characterization of 9/11 as a traumatic event that ushered in new subjectivities, impacting the modes for aesthetic expression, much in the same way as other traumatic events of the past (Kaplan 2005, 4). War films released after 9/11 are situated within the context of a post-9/11 world, even if they are not depicting post-9/11 combat scenarios (such as Clint Eastwood’s *Flags of Our Fathers* or *Letters from Iwo Jima*). This new subjectivity sets these contemporary films further apart from the Vietnam War films than war films released during the 1990s and makes the differences highlighted by my comparative analyses more striking and informative.

The first issue I wish to address in this thesis concerns the origins of genre memory in war films, which can be traced back to the American Civil War. The second issue to address is the re-writing of visual codes in contemporary war films, exemplified strongly in the Iraq War films. Third, I will explore how this new “logistics of perception” in war, to quote Paul Virilio, has been extended to war films which are primarily set away from the war zone—the ‘veteran film’, in which radically altered domestic landscapes are a testimony to the trauma the veteran characters experienced overseas. Next, I show how contemporary war films bring into relief a discourse on national narratives—what contemporary war films have to say about war shaping

national identity. Lastly, I will return to the influence of pre-cinema representational modes on war cinema, an influence that continues into the twenty-first century. This last point is crucial to my research, as it fleshes out the role that genre memory plays in contemporary war films.

### The American Civil War and Genre Memory

During the mid 1890s, two events coincided with the early film exhibitions from Edison and the Lumière brothers: Stephen Crane a twenty-two-year-old bohemian New Yorker, a man who had never witnessed combat in his life, published *The Red Badge of Courage* in 1895, a graphic and compelling account of the American Civil War told through the eyes of a young Union private and based largely on accounts from veterans, historians, and a popular post-war anthology *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, a collection of essays from both Union and Confederate veterans (Morris 2007, 137).<sup>1</sup> Second, the mid 1890s saw the re-emergence of the Civil War photographs of Matthew Brady, thought to have been lost and long forgotten. These events appear to have set the stage for developing the visual language for one of the longest generic and topical traditions in film history: the war film.

What is striking about Crane's novel is how closely the narration and descriptions of combat resemble a screenplay treatment for future Hollywood war cinema. Daniel Aaron argues that "like all great creative artists, Crane first gets the physical details right, then uses those details in the services of a larger emotional truth. He doesn't care so much what Henry sees as how it makes him feel and, through those feelings, act" (Aaron 1968, 211). A feature that connects the Crane's work and other first-person narratives of combat to the war film is the "emotional truth." War narratives

rely on pathos to transport the reader or spectator to a chaotic world where, according to André Bazin, “war, with its harvest of corpses, its immense destruction...leaves far behind it the art of imagination” (Bazin 1967, 31). Pathos in war cinema is the process through which emotions are mobilized through audiovisual strategies. The letters and diaries of Civil War soldiers, considered even today as an essential component of the historical record of that war, project a pathos that lends itself to the reimagining of combat, in terms of narration and visual storytelling.<sup>2</sup>

The photographs that survived the Civil War also contain formulas of pathos, where, according to Hermann Kappelhoff, a sense of moral outrage and feelings of remembrance are combined in the images of death, destruction, and shell-shocked faces (Kappelhoff 2001, 4). Photography was still a young art form at the start of the Civil War, and the shutter speed and massive amounts of heavy equipment required prevented photographs from being taken during actual combat (this task would be left to on-scene newspaper sketch artists). The photographs taken by Mathew Brady and his cohorts were often staged: combat units, soldiers in camp, and even corpses were arranged for dramatic impact. Yet, what set these photographs apart from the battlefield sketch illustrations of *Harpers Weekly* was the address to the spectator, often from soldiers looking directly into the camera. The story of the war as told by journalists were, in effect, challenged by the untold story these photographs conveyed, supported by the pathos formulas contained in the image. The challenging of news media representations of war, the challenging of official discourse, has been a long-standing feature of war cinema up to the present, and it is the pathos provided by images, often combined with the emotional truth of soldier testimonies, that tell the untold stories.



My first chapter will flesh out the influence of Civil War representational modes to offer an additional form of scholarship concerning the documentary war film—an important component of cinematic war representation. In my analysis of Emile de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* (Emile de Antonio Productions, 1968) and Tim Hetherington and Sebastian Jünger's *Restrepo* (National Geographic/Dogwoof, 2010), I explicitly cite the American Civil War as a rehearsal for the war film, as that conflict essentially provided a partial template for the American war film which was to arrive no more than fifty years later: the weaponry and tactics contributed to a logistics of perception for future cinematographers, the diaries and epistolary writings of the combatants informed the narration present in many war films, and war photography provided a form for capturing the gruesome reality of war.

*In the Year of the Pig* draws upon the influence of Civil War photography but does so to provide a history of the Vietnam conflict in contrast to the 'official' history provided by Washington and the media. *In the Year of the Pig* seeks to provide the audience with hidden pictures, and De Antonio's film finds its polemical strength in the influence of Matthew Brady's photography, probably due in part to the fact that Brady's photography also provided a counter-history in its day; the brutal and graphic images of the Civil War shattered a cultural memory of war maintained by late eighteenth and early nineteenth century painters, and a history written by newspaper sketch artists, whose work was prone to manipulation and alteration along partisan lines. De Antonio's images serve the dual function of competing with official images and presenting new images. De Antonio's own education in photography during the 1930s contributed to this, as his cohorts admired Brady's photography—highly

emotive and brutally honest images which can be viewed as a precursor to the documentary film.

*Restrepo*, on the other hand, draws upon the influence of the Civil War soldier diary—a narrative form that laid the groundwork for the voiceover narration in narrative war films and documentaries. The influence of the Civil War soldier diary in *Restrepo* is seen specifically in the talking-head segments, which are a continuation of a documentary film convention but used to achieve aims similar to those of the writings of Civil War soldiers. The war experience is provided with pathos; the audience is personally navigated through combat; the soldier's life off the battlefield, shaped by an experience on the battlefield, is brought into relief; and, most importantly, a deeply humanistic alternative to the history written from afar is provided. *Restrepo*'s soldiers speak directly to the viewer, looking right into the camera, and serve the purpose of the invisible narrator of a documentary film clearly influenced by narrative war films, both recently releases and those of the distant past.<sup>3</sup> Like de Antonio's film, *Restrepo* seeks to challenge a history being written by Washington and the mainstream media, but the counter-history Hetherington and Jünger provide is one with a more human dimension, consonant with the function of the Civil War diary in narrative war cinema of the twentieth century.

The American Civil War can be read as a rehearsal for modern warfare, as the technology employed and anticipated the speed of travel and the ability to capture motion in the twentieth century. The use of railways and steamboats could effectively transport troops through a country that was becoming increasingly unified and less the primitive unknown traversed by their grandfathers in the Revolution. Field binoculars, hot air balloon reconnaissance, telegraph cables, and the signal corps' use of

semaphore allowed for information to travel rapidly. The trenches surrounding Vicksburg, Mississippi and Petersburg, Virginia were a harbinger of the trenches at the Somme (1916). Most importantly, the weaponry of the war expanded war's capacity for mass destruction and the ability to destroy targets in motion. The rifle and mini-ball had a kill range up to four hundred yards, in sharp contrast to the smoothbore musket's kill range of one hundred yards. The revolver and Henry repeating rifle allowed for several shots to be fired in rapid succession. Most chilling of all was the introduction of the Gatling gun, an automatic weapon that, while not frequently used during the war, anticipated the machine guns of twentieth century warfare. What connects the technology of the Civil War to the history of war and cinema is the link provided between military technology, perception, and ultimately representation. For example, the Gatling gun (inspired by the rotating paddles on a steamboat) gave rise to Etienne-Jules Marey's chronophotographic rifle, a camera that could take photographs in rapid succession and precursor to the motion picture camera. The connection between how war is waged and how war represented, as evidenced in the aftermath of the Civil War, is an important component of understanding how the visual codes of the war film have evolved throughout film history.

#### Changes in the war film's visual codes

In Brian De Palma's Iraq War film *Redacted* (Magnolia Pictures, 2007), a key scene comments on some of the representational issues at the heart of contemporary war films. Soldier Angel Salazar (Izzy Diaz) interviews his fellow soldiers with a digital camera for what he hopes will be his future film school application reel. He asks one reluctant soldier to speak of his combat experience, advising, "The camera never

lies”. The interviewee responds: “That’s bullshit. That’s *all* that camera does is lie”. This exchange captures a strong characteristic of contemporary war cinema and provides a subtle commentary on the role war films play within the canon of post-9/11 American cinema. De Palma uses this scene to highlight the concern for honest representation and verisimilitude in war cinema, a demand placed on filmmakers since the genre’s inception.

The work of Paul Virilio is essential to understanding how the visual codes of the war film have developed throughout film history. In his work *War and Cinema* (first released in 1984), Virilio highlights the ways in which war technology and cinema technology have developed in conjunction, as both technologies are centered on perception and movement. From Etienne-Jules Marey’s chronophotographic rifle, a “precursor of the Lumière brothers’ camera and a direct descendent of the Colt revolvers and cylindrical guns,” to the strategic missile defense initiative of the Reagan era (dubbed “Star Wars”), there exists an interdependency between the strategies for waging war and the strategies for representing war (Virilio 1984, 68). Still, Virilio acknowledges the challenge of providing verisimilitude in representations of battlefields that have been emptied of the capacity for art and imagination, ever since the early attempts by American filmmakers to document the First World War (15). Contemporary war cinema finds intact this connection between war and cinematic representation, as well as the representational challenges presented by contemporary conflicts and evolving strategies. In this thesis, I will show how contemporary war films are visually constructed in relation to the notions put forth by Virilio and address the representational challenges presented by the conflicts being depicted.

In my second chapter, I will explore two films about different wars from the same director, Brian De Palma's Vietnam War film *Casualties of War* (Columbia Pictures, 1989) and his Iraq War film *Redacted*, to highlight how post-9/11 war films make use of the technology employed in contemporary conflicts to construct their address to the spectator. In *Redacted*, De Palma employs the various cinematic modes used in the Iraq War—documentary films, digital-video diaries, CCTV, Internet videos, and night-vision helmet cameras—in order to support his explicit critique of the Iraq War and to highlight the similarities and differences between the Iraq War and the Vietnam War. This critique of the Iraq War is further highlighted through the thematic similarities and differences between *Redacted* and *Casualties of War*. My comparison of these two films will address the ideas put forward by Paul Virilio, that “there is no war without representation” (Virilio, 1984, 6), and Friedrich Kittler, that “the transport of pictures only repeats the transport of bullets” (Kittler, 1999, 124), and how these notions pertain to contemporary war films.

Central to my analysis of the new visual modes in contemporary war cinema, exemplified by *Redacted*, are the arguments presented by Garrett Stewart and Patricia Pisters. On the one hand, the use of digital technology in framing the action feels cumbersome rather than minimalist. The “very programing of the genre”, according to Garrett Stewart, “may seem to have crashed—and in part from the electronic overload at the plot level itself” (Stewart, 2009, 47). The result is what Stewart refers to as “digital fatigue”: contemporary war films which feel just as staged as previous war films and contemporary mainstream media coverage—an irony when one considers that the aim of this new representational mode is to contest previous war cinema and mainstream media coverage. On the other hand, films such as *Redacted*, according to

Patricia Pisters, stand alongside Baudrillard in denouncing the presentation of “virtual war[s] without human targets” (Pisters, 2010, 238). The influence of war technology upon cinematic representations of war, as highlighted by the work of Virilio and Kittler, does not actually strip war cinema of the human agency, a feature of war films since the silent era. Rather, the logistics of perception in war, both in waging war and in representing it, are contested in order to humanize the war experience and to provide a critique of the war.

### The veteran film

For Robert Eberwein, the war film focuses, in varying degrees, on “the activities of the participants off the battlefield” and the “effects of war on human relationships” (Eberwein, 2010, 45). In Paul Haggis’ *In the Valley of Elah* (Warner Independent Pictures, 2007), the subject of my third chapter, the spectator revisits a familiar trope from previous war films. The traumatized war veteran, failing to connect with his pre-war life, is split into two characters in Haggis’s film: the father, a veteran of the Vietnam War, and the son, a veteran of the Iraq War. Certainly, Haggis’s film is an explicit critique of U.S. foreign policy, but it also poses the question asked in other ‘homecoming’ films. Jim Sheridan’s Afghanistan War veteran film *Brothers* (Lionsgate, 2010), Michael Cimino’s *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, 1978), Hal Ashby’s *Coming Home* (United Artists, 1978), and William Wyler’s World War II veteran film *The Best Years of Our Lives* (RKO Pictures, 1946) question whether the veteran’s inability to function normally back home is due to the fact that the war has changed him, but not his homeland, or the other way around, or both. Even though the war may not actually touch American soil, the American social order and



American culture are shaped by the conflict, and American war cinema renders this in a variety of ways through genre memory.

Both *The Deer Hunter* and *In the Valley of Elah* render the altered social landscape of the home front visually through editing and cinematography. The differences are striking and reveal much about the cultural shifts that have taken place since the end of the Vietnam War. On the one hand, *The Deer Hunter*, a film often compared to the Western or Romantic novel, employs a visual approach in which the camera rarely calls attention to itself—the subjects walk in and out of the frame with few tracking movements, and an altered social landscape is exemplified by the way in which cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond fills the frame. On the other hand, Roger Deakins, the cinematographer of *In the Valley of Elah*, performs an interesting exercise in genre memory: Deakins borrows from Zsigmond, using long, wide shots in which the American southwest stands in for Cimino's industrial northeast as a character in the film. But Deakins also incorporates the digital technology (and multiple screens) through which the audience has come to understand the Iraq conflict. The cell phone video (and final testimony) of the son, Mike Deerfield, acts as a mirror that Haggis holds up to the audience. The digital video of U.S. servicemen running over an Iraqi child with their Humvee seems to articulate the argument that the American landscape and the Iraq landscape are being refashioned simultaneously.

#### War mythology and narrative of nation

While some war films are concerned with war's destruction of moral fiber and the social landscape of the nations involved in conflict, other war films center on the building of national and ethnic identities through a shared combat experience. Fredric

Jameson writes, “American war films, taking class difference for granted and only gradually absorbing racial difference, found their originality psychologically, in the typology of personalities thrown together in a group (war machine)” (Jameson, 2009, 1534). Throughout the history of war cinema, the combat group has embodied varying notions of national identity, and in many instances has provided a means for cinematically rendering debates on war mythology and the narrative of nation. I argue that the composition of the combat unit in contemporary war films, and how it functions within these films, is linked to the post-9/11 debate on American exceptionalism.<sup>4</sup>

Conventional war films depict war as a condition which consolidates persons of various classes and characteristics under one single interpretation of a national mythology. This is clearly manifested in the films produced during World War II and the two decades that followed. Zoltan Korda’s *Sahara* (Columbia Pictures, 1943) depicts a wandering Allied combat group comprised of multinational and multilingual characters bound by a common purpose and sense of duty, subscribing to a single narrative. Tay Garnett’s *Bataan* (MGM, 1943) carries the tagline “the story of a patrol of 13 heroes”, and a diverse set of thirteen characters is psychologically bound in the film to a single narrative of national identity and sense of duty. In the Vietnam War films, however, the role of the combat group shifted. The “PBR street gang” of *Apocalypse Now* (United Artists, 1979) is an ethnically and geographically diverse set, but the psychological glue holding them together is the almost palpable fear of the jungle that surrounds them. They have no knowledge of “the mission”, just “the orders” for which they develop much contempt—captured in Chef’s (Frederic Forrest) line while fleeing not from the Viet Cong but from a tiger: “I didn’t sign up for this shit, man”.

In my fourth chapter, John Irvin's *Hamburger Hill* (Paramount Pictures, 1987) and Clint Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers* (Dreamworks, 2006) will bring into relief the differing voices in dialogue with the history of war and racial identity in the United States—the first film concerning African American servicemen in the Vietnam War and the second film featuring a Native American serviceman in World War II. Irvin's film, though tonally conservative, explores both the racial tensions and the camaraderie between white soldiers and African American soldiers twenty years after President Truman desegregated the U.S. military through an executive order. *Hamburger Hill* specifically uses the diverse military unit, a war film trope with a strong presence in the World War II combat film, to bring the racial tensions in the United States during the 1960s to the battlefields of Vietnam—countering these tensions with the shared desire, of soldiers of all races, to stay alive. Irvin and screenwriter John Carabatsos were in Vietnam during the conflict, the former as a documentary filmmaker and the latter as a soldier, and together they translate their experiences into a film that provides a challenge to Anthony D. Smith's assertion that war “acts as a mobilizer of ethnic sentiments and national consciousness, a centralizing force of life...and a provider of myths and memories for future generations” (Smith, 1991, 27).

Eastwood's film, by contrast, performs a deconstruction of war's impact on national and racial identity by straddling the dividing line of the post-9/11 American exceptionalism debate—a debate upon which much of America's post-9/11 identity has been negotiated. *Flags of Our Fathers* uses the Pima Indian character of Ira Hayes to critique both sides of the American exceptionalism debate, in particular the myth-making that occurs during times of war; Ira Hayes is presented as a tragic character

caught in the middle of war's myth-building machine. Eastwood did not serve in World War II or Vietnam either but the reputation he has built for himself as a director whose films critique past mythologies is felt in *Flags of Our Fathers*. The mythology surrounding the exploits of Ira Hayes and his comrades on Iwo Jima—from Joe Rosenthal's iconic photograph to biographical films (featuring Tony Curtis and Lee Majors as Hayes) to ballads by Johnny Cash and Bob Dylan—is obliquely acknowledged in Eastwood's film, only to be dismantled and demystified for the purpose of bringing the story of Hayes (and the Mt. Suribachi flag-raising) into a relevant, post-9/11 context. Here, *Flags of Our Fathers* contains a clear engagement with genre memory to perform its critique of war mythology. The cultural memory of World War II (through iconic photographs and documentaries),<sup>5</sup> the visual style of recent World War II films, and meditations on war and the construction of national identity, present in previous war films, contribute to Eastwood's critique of both the (right-leaning) hero culture erected after 9/11 and the (left-leaning) focus on diversity within the larger American national narrative.

#### War and pre-cinema aesthetics

Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* is perhaps one of the most iconic Vietnam War films in American history, and the scholarship it has occasioned is vast. In my final chapter, in which I contrast Coppola's film with Kathryn Bigelow's Iraq War film *The Hurt Locker*, I depart from the common analytical focal points applied to the film—modernist narrative form, critiques of post-colonialism, existentialist philosophy, et cetera—and instead place Coppola's film, along with Bigelow's, in the discussion of genre memory in the war film. What this chapter will demonstrate is the importance of constructing genre memory through a dialogue with pre-cinema

aesthetic and narrative modes. While many scholars have remarked on the influence of nineteenth century panorama paintings on the visual composition of the twentieth century war film, *Apocalypse Now* draws upon a different pre-cinema spectacle art form to aid in its post-war analysis of the Vietnam War and neo-colonialism further distinguishing the film from previous war films: the phantasmagoria.<sup>6</sup>

Freud, writing while Europe was embroiled in World War I, remarked that war will never cease as long as “nations live under such widely differing conditions” and “the value of individual life is variously assessed among them”. Here he speaks of a symptomatic disillusionment during a time of war, one that manifests itself psychologically as the non-combatant becomes “bewildered in his orientation” (Freud, 1915). Coppola employs phantasmagoric imagery in his Vietnam War setting to mimic the same sense of disillusionment that occurred during the Vietnam War and its aftermath. Through this visual approach, *Apocalypse Now* aesthetically renders war trauma, what we have come to know scientifically as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as battlefield haunting. The presentation of the battlefield as a haunted site has always had a distinct presence in war films, and *Apocalypse Now* transcribes this haunting through its use of phantasmagoria.<sup>7</sup> The superimposing of images (juxtaposition and double-exposure), coupled with the trope of battlefield haunting present in early war films and literature, works in conjunction with Freud’s notion of the uncanny—instances of which are placed at various points throughout the film—to provide a counter-history of not just the Vietnam War but also American war mythology in general.

*The Hurt Locker*, by contrast, turns on the influence of panorama paintings to provide a similar critique. The traditional panoramic vision in the war films of the twentieth

century, however, is refashioned through use of multiple cameras and montage to resemble something more akin to the American tradition of the moving panorama: paintings, moving around a circular rotunda, containing vague or elusive vanishing points, the spectator's vision brought to focus on different points as if an invisible director and editor were present. The result is a twenty-first century war film that borrows thematically from *Apocalypse Now*—using elements of the uncanny as well as a younger version of *Apocalypse Now*'s Willard character—while at the same time presenting a viscerally unique experience. The film's critique of warfare is achieved, however, through the construction of a battle zone milieu which disorients the spectator and provides a challenge to the pathos formula provided by panorama paintings and incorporated into twentieth century war films.<sup>8</sup> The vision of the Iraq War as a moving panorama in *The Hurt Locker* provides an exceptional example of genre memory operating in the twenty-first century war film: a past mode is remembered and reshaped through contemporary modes of expression.

What I aim to do in this thesis is to argue that contemporary war films are not a complete departure from past forms of war representation, as has been argued by many theorists, but rather they can be seen as the latest chapter in a long history of reimagining American military and cultural history in pictorial and narrative form. I argue that twenty-first century American war films are constructed in dialogue with the past, repurposing earlier forms of war representation by evoking the visual and narrative memory of the past that is embedded in genre form. Through my pairing of Vietnam War films with post-9/11 war films, this thesis will illustrate how the war films of the twenty-first century perform family narrative functions from previous war films but from the gaze of the immediate present: how these films envision war's



impact on culture and social space, explore how war refashions ideas about race and national identity, and re-imagine war's rewriting of the human psyche. Constructed in explicit relation to the Vietnam film, I argue that post-9/11 war films rehearse the history of war representation in American culture while also emphasizing the radically different culture of the present day.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> At twenty-two years old, Stephen Crane based *The Red Badge of Courage* on a variety of sources both oral and written, including the accounts of Civil War veterans in his adopted hometown of Port Jervis, New York, and the firsthand experiences of his prep school history professor, a true veteran of the Battle of Antietam. In addition, Crane pored over volumes of *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, a collection of reminiscences by Union and Confederate veterans, as well as the fiction works of such former soldiers John W. De Forest and Ambrose Bierce.

<sup>2</sup> For further information on how scenes of pathos operate in war cinema and media, the Freie Universität Berlin's *War Film Project*, "The mobilization of emotions in war film":

<http://www.fuberlin.de/en/presse/informationen/wissenschaft/2012/201203/kriegsfilm.html>

<sup>3</sup> In the first chapter, I note that the opening scene in particular is a visual nod to *Apocalypse Now* and *Black Hawk Down*, but the film was also marketed as being "like *The Hurt Locker* only real".

<sup>4</sup> In this thesis, the term "American exceptionalism" should be understood as the view that the United States possesses exceptional qualities, placing it in a special category above other nations, and, as such, is burdened with a moral duty to spread democracy.

<sup>5</sup> The release of both *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima* coincided with the release of Ken Burns's *The War* (PBS, 2006), a documentary following a style similar to Burns's earlier works and featuring testimonies from an ethnically diverse set of combat veterans.

<sup>6</sup> For my definition of "phantasmagoria," I turn to the work of Ian Christie: Developed in Paris during the late eighteenth century, phantasmagoria was a spectacle form in which a lantern, placed behind a screen and mounted with a shutter containing painted slides, projected ghostly images upon the screen (Christie, 1994, 111). Phantasmagoria and its influence upon cinema will be later discussed in chapter five.

<sup>7</sup> With regards to battlefield haunting, I draw upon the work of Elisabeth Bronfen, in particular her forthcoming work *Specters of War* (Routledge, 2012), and Robert Burgoyne ("Haunting in the War Film: *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*". *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*. Minnesota, 2010: 164–189).

<sup>8</sup> My concept of pathos formulas in war representations is drawn from the work of Elisabeth Bronfen (Routledge, 2012) and Hermann Kappelhoff ("For Love of Country: World War II in Hollywood Cinema at the Turn of the Century", unpublished manuscript used with permission from the author); stemming from the work of German art historian Aby Warburg, "pathos formula" can be understood as the way that a work of art is aesthetically organized so that the spectator can experience chaos (in this case, war) while at the same time take part in remembrance from a safe vantage point.

## Chapter One

### **“The incommunicable experience of war”: War photography and the soldier diary in war documentary films *In the Year of the Pig* (1968) and *Restrepo* (2010)**



Fig. 1.1. Tim Hetherington and Sebastian Jünger's Afghanistan War documentary *Restrepo* (National Geographic/Dogwoof Pictures, 2010).

Film critic Roger Ebert writes: “Films are the wrong medium for fact. Fact belongs in print. Films are about emotions” (Ebert, 2002, 234). Documentary films, however, present a particular challenge to Ebert’s observation, as they deal in both fact and emotion, insisting that the two are inseparable. This is a view which appears to confirm Bill Nichols oft-quoted remark that documentary is a “fiction (un)like any other”. From the Soviet films of the 1920s to post-9/11 Hollywood films, fact, fiction, and emotion have been orchestrated in documentary films to create a ‘truth-telling’ film medium, serving as both an educational experience and an engaging art form.<sup>1</sup> War documentaries are even more explicitly fashioned as appeals to emotion while simultaneously expressing fact-based arguments that often challenge official messages about war. The discourse of fact and emotion in war documentaries should

not be seen to limit objectivity, or to compromise emotional truth, but rather as part of a historical tradition, combining reportage and direct testimony. The war documentary, I argue, has antecedents in two pre-cinematic forms: the soldier diary and battlefield photography. Both forms of pre-cinematic ‘witnessing’ are aimed at provoking strong emotion through the use of fact-based documentation, and both forms can be found in contemporary war documentaries.

In this chapter, I will explore two celebrated war documentaries and their connection to these discourses of war representation from the nineteenth century. Although war photography and the soldier diary can be traced to periods earlier than the American Civil War—war photography, for example, was used in the Crimean War (1853–1856)<sup>2</sup>—their use in the Civil War provided an influential template for twentieth century filmmakers.<sup>3</sup> Radically different films in terms of their narrative focus, politics, and stylistic approach, Emile de Antonio’s polemical Vietnam War documentary *In the Year of the Pig* (Emile de Antonio Productions, 1968) and Tim Hetherington and Sebastian Jünger’s ‘grunt documentary’<sup>4</sup> *Restrepo* (National Geographic/Dogwoof, 2010) share a powerful use of earlier traditions of documentation. *In the Year of the Pig* draws upon the tradition of nineteenth century war photography and *Restrepo* draws upon the tradition of the soldier diary.



Fig. 1.2. The immolation of an anti-war activist, from the opening sequence of Emile de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* (1968).

Four years after the release of *In the Year of the Pig*, de Antonio observed that “power no longer resides in the universities, as it once may have, but in the television aerial” (de Antonio, 1972, 17). The dispensing of information to the public, vital to the upkeep of a healthy democracy, had shifted to television news, he suggested, and was therefore highly susceptible to manipulation by powerful interests. De Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* was a polemical challenge to the official discourse concerning the Vietnam War promoted through television. It relied heavily on the power of images not shown by the media (Fig. 1.2), offering a competing set of images which provide a counter-history of the Vietnam War; at the time of the film, images of the war were either distorted, sanitized, or not shown by the mainstream media.<sup>5</sup> De Antonio rearranged and presented these early photographs of the war in a way which recalls the role of surviving Civil War photographs, preserving a graphic history of the war

for future generations, one which would counter the history provided by the networks and the mainstream media; the technology introduced during the Civil War not only furthered the development of mechanized war but also influenced the strategies used to document war.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 1.3 An 1865 photograph of disinterred corpses from the Battles of Gaines' Mill and Cold Harbor (Virginia).

Although *Restrepo* has none of the polemical charge of *In the Year of the Pig*, a film that was explicitly intended to incite a “revolution [that] will change the values that have polluted our heads and rivers” (Lewis, 2000, 77), it does seek to challenge the “power [that] resides...in the television aerial”, or in this case, the cable news broadcast, by using the soldier testimonial to add a human dimension to the images of the Afghanistan War. The soldiers in *Restrepo* provide testimonies of their experience in Afghanistan’s Korengal Valley, addressing the camera directly. I argue that these first-person testimonials function in the same way as Civil War soldier diaries,

offering a vivid and deeply personal account of the war. Soldier diaries from the Civil War provided twentieth century historians with the tools to write a history of the Civil War which went beyond the war department records, high-brass dictates, and, most importantly, newspaper war correspondence, which was widely seen by contemporary and future scholars as corrupted reportage, prone to political influence. *Restrepo* seeks to provide a similar mode of historiography, an alternative to the history written by journalists, through its soldier testimonies.

In this chapter, I argue that war photography and soldier testimonies, particularly those of the Civil War, are used in *In the Year of the Pig* and *Restrepo* to reveal what is hidden from mainstream war reportage. In the former, de Antonio presents the hidden images of war. *In The Year of the Pig* works as agitprop, using archival material “illustratively as part of historical exposition...[and] as part of a more politically historical argument or debate” (Bruzzi, 2000, 21). In the latter, it is the hidden stories that are revealed. *Restrepo* inserts the tradition of soldier-as-witness into a documentary filmmaking style to which we have grown accustomed through stations such as PBS in the United States and Channel Four in the United Kingdom, in order to bring the audience closer to the heart of the action and, perhaps, derive a better understanding of the war itself.



Blessed are the peacemakers



Fig. 1.4. The opening shot of Emile de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* (1968): a photograph of the monument to the 54th Massachusetts regiment, the first African American unit of the Civil War and the subject of Edward Zwick's 1989 film *Glory*.

The opening credit sequence of *In the Year of the Pig* immediately alerts the viewer to the film's legacy in the tradition of radical political filmmaking. The twenty-first century viewer is advised that they are watching a film restored for DVD presentation by the UCLA Film and Television archive (Ross Lipman) and the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, with the original wear and tear kept intact, and with a preservation completion date of 2003—the year the Iraq War began. The first images are still photographs of Civil War monuments, cutting back and forth to black screens with vertical, static credit titles. On the audio track, as we watch these images, we hear a mechanical whirring noise which is difficult to identify (it is, according to de Antonio, the sound of twelve different helicopter blades electronically blended together to come out as one sound). The noise halts abruptly as an image of a tombstone appears on screen. The inscription reads: "As soon as I heard of American independence, my heart was enlisted – Joseph Angel, 1776". After this, the audience

is treated to the film's first moving image shot, one which re-contextualizes the patriot ethos of America's past. An elderly Vietnamese man, with children behind him, walks past the camera, which pans with him. The man makes a bow towards the camera, then continues walking, briefly glancing back at the camera with a fearful look in his eye (Fig. 1.5). The sequence ends with a dose of irony, footage of a Washington official proclaiming: "I would remind you that scripture tells us, that blessed are the peacemakers". Through this credit sequence, de Antonio casts his film as a historical documentary, but one which stands in stark contrast to the historical documentaries with which students of the time (and after) would have been familiar. This is a de-familiarizing, agitational documentary in which the enemy is recast as the American Revolutionary War soldier (or possibly a member of the 54th Massachusetts regiment), and the United States is recast as the British or the Confederacy.



Fig. 1.5 Two stills of the elderly Vietnamese man from the first motion picture sequence from the opening of Emile de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* (1968).

Apart from drawing on American Civil War and American Revolutionary War iconography in the opening credit sequence, de Antonio's images are aimed at



affecting the spectator in a manner similar to the photographs of the Civil War, brutal images aimed at demythologizing American military exploits.<sup>7</sup> The images de Antonio uses both illustrate and preserve a history of the war, with a particular emphasis on the decades preceding Johnson's escalation of the conflict in 1964. The manner in which de Antonio presents his images recalls the composition of Matthew Brady's Civil War photographs: still portraits of important figures, including a young Ho Chi Minh, group photographs of Viet Minh guerrillas proudly posing together, and corpses strewn about the battlefield (Fig. 1.6). He pans across still images and newspaper articles, a tactic which documentary filmmaker Ken Burns would later use. Even when the images are not photographs but part of a motion picture shot, de Antonio often holds the shot on these images, placing emphasis on particular moral or historical signifiers or references within the frame.



Fig. 1.6. (Clockwise from top left) Viet Minh soldiers posing pre-Dien Bien Phu (*In the Year of the Pig*), Confederate soldiers posing at Antietam (Matthew Brady, 1862), Confederate dead at Antietam (Brady, 1862), and Vietnamese dead following a U.S. offensive (*In the Year of the Pig*).

De Antonio's approach to *In the Year of the Pig*, and his use of imagery in the film, was not informed by Civil War photographs alone but also by other documentaries about the Vietnam War emerging at the time. In 1967, Eugene Jones released *A Face of War*, perhaps the first critical American documentary on the Vietnam War. Jones's film impressed de Antonio as it attempted to counter U.S. Department of Defense documentaries, but de Antonio was concerned that the film failed to address the viewpoint of the Vietnamese (79).<sup>8</sup> De Antonio found more inspiration in foreign documentaries: Pierre Schoendorffer's *The Anderson Platoon* (France, 1966), Joris Ivens's *17e parallèle: La guerre du peuple/The Seventeenth Parallel: Vietnam in War* (France, 1967), and Ivens's collaboration with Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard, and others in *Loin de Vietnam (Far From Vietnam)*, (France, 1967) (79). The influence of these films, particularly Iven's *17e parallèle* (Fig. 1.7), can be felt in de Antonio's film, as these films offer portraits of the Vietnam War through the eyes of the Vietnamese. Yet, despite de Antonio's admiration for these films, he felt that they were "too vague" and lacked a context that would make the North Vietnamese/Vietcong narrative accessible to American audiences (79).<sup>9</sup> The counter-historical documentary approach of *In the Year of the Pig* was, therefore, a reaction to these concerns.



Fig. 1.7. A scene from Joris Iven's *17e parallèle* (France, 1967), shot in North Vietnam.

*In the Year of the Pig...was meant to create a historical/intellectual perspective of the war, in which everybody was involved emotionally and didn't know the first fucking thing about it....Everything in the film bends towards that idea.* – Emile de Antonio, Interview with Warren Green, 1978 (Emile de Antonio archive, Wisconsin State Historical Society)

After the opening credits, the film proceeds in the manner expected of a historical documentary film in setting the stage for the events of 1968: black and white colonial footage from French Indochina during the 1930s and 1940s (which de Antonio had procured from Paramount Studios, incidentally) is shown ahead of the ‘talking heads’—ambassadors, former French colonial officials, and a professor of Buddhism; people who had met Ho Chi Minh discussing Ho’s connection with the Vietnamese people. These images, according to de Antonio, were intended to provide “a history without narration” (Green, 1978). This segment of the film and many of the proceeding segments serve the narrative purpose of providing the audience with intellectual arguments to counter the administration’s narrative. The power of the image to arouse sentiment without the assistance of narration, however, is critical to de Antonio’s use of the film form to create his “historical/intellectual perspective”. When we see footage of Senator Thurston B. Morton (of Kentucky, a Republican)

stating that Ho Chi Minh “is considered by the North Vietnamese and a considerable portion of the South Vietnamese as the George Washington of their country”, the recasting of Ho Chi Minh against the caricature presented by Washington and the press is made even more persuasive through the images presented in this segment of the film, those of Ho Chi Minh and his followers taken before American involvement in the conflict.

The connection de Antonio makes between the Vietnam War and earlier American conflicts can be illustrated by comparing two separate still images (Fig. 1.8): an American G.I. dying in a Vietnamese forest during the final segment of *In the Year of the Pig* and a dead Union soldier at Cold Harbor, Virginia (1864).



Fig. 1.8. A Union soldier lies dead at Cold Harbor, Virginia (left) in 1864, and a G.I. convulses in death throes in a Vietnamese forest in *In the Year of the Pig* (1968) (right).

Despite being culled from a film reel, this shot from de Antonio’s film (above)—either slowed down in editing or under-cranked during filming—possesses a similar evocative power as the Cold Harbor image. Even though we know (or have a rough estimate of) when both images were photographed, in both images it is time which is “out of place”, in the words of Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1981, 96). Both wars are humanized because the suffering and tragedy are transmitted through the face in the image. Images such as these are, according to Hermann Kappelhoff, “endlessly

condensed micro-episode[s] occurring as affect”. The images of these soldiers invite us to re-live war’s savagery with us in their place (Kappelhoff, unpublished manuscript, 2). The viewer may not know the names of either soldier, but what cannot be described in a June 1864 edition of *Harper’s Weekly* or in a *New York Times* article circa 1965–1968 is transcribed through these images.

The photographs that survived the Civil War found their emotive power in the pathos they transmitted. The living and dead featured in these photographs provide human agency to an untold story, and invite the spectator to take part in remembrance from a safe distance. For Elisabeth Bronfen, the pathos provided by the figures in these photographs “[apprehend] the ungraspable intensity of war” because a balance is struck between “comprehending an intense emotion by taping into ones own imaginative capacity and offering a conceptual presentation of it” (Bronfen 2012, 20). This formula of pathos is used to the same effect in war films, both fictional narrative and documentary, as it allows for the audience to navigate through chaos of battle spaces that have been striped of the capacity for imagination. In de Antonio’s film, the pathos provided by the images he presents is used to mobilize sentiments of moral outrage against imperial violence and sentiments of sympathy for those who suffer at the hands of this violence.

Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites assert that “just as emotions are construed as the outward expression of internal forces, the photo creates its own emotional power by situating an outcry within its compositional structure that compresses as it channels what is not otherwise being expressed in the scene” (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007, 145). An image, still or moving, possesses the power to tell a story beyond what is simply captured in the frame. De Antonio’s images of Vietnam are used not only to

complement the testimonies of scholars, such as Yale Professor of Buddhism Paul Mus and French historian Jean Lacouture, who are featured in the film, nor are they merely used to contrast the archival footage of Lyndon Johnson, John Foster Dulles, or Senator Joseph McCarthy justifying aggression in Indochina, a tactic employed in war documentaries such as Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004); owing to their expressive potentials, the images themselves *are* the history

In documentary films, photographs “are dumb”, according to Paula Rabinowitz; “Their meaning is constructed in a web of interpretations we give them through technology...sound, montage, context, and narrative” (Rabinowitz, 1993, 120). This is certainly the case with de Antonio's film, his arrangement of images offering a highly politicized reading of history. The way he selects and uses these images, however, is connected to a history of American photography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

In the 1920s, two ideas were introduced which bolstered the need for documentary moving images and presentation. Walter Benjamin argued that it was important for writers to take up photography in order to provide images, ones encountered daily by the public, with narrative and context.<sup>10</sup> In his *Kino-Eye Manifesto*, Dziga Vertov argued for a form which would replace *mise-en-scène* with documentary to create an “‘un-played film’ over the ‘played film’”.<sup>11</sup> Both of these ideas are manifest in de Antonio's film. The images are provided with a narrative (specifically a counter-narrative) which acts as an organizing principle. De Antonio presents his film as the ‘un-played film’ culled from several ‘played films’.

De Antonio's artistic education coincided with what has been termed the “golden age of documentary photography” of the 1930s, when, as described by Sharon Corwin

and Ron Tyler, a new generation of photographers “embraced it and reinvented it”, and photographic technology advanced (Corwin, 2010, 3). The basic tenets of 1930s documentary photography, however, were already a part of the photographic tradition. Two ideas of what a photographer should be were merged during this period: first, the photographer “should provide an image of a social fact that is far away or otherwise hidden from view”, and second, the photographer should provide images that “can reflect and document a social investigation, most often [involving] the vexed issues of class, labor, race, and ethnicity” (Corwin, 2010, 3). It is no accident that the young generation of 1930s documentary photographers were influenced by Parisian photographer Eugene Atget and Civil War photographer Matthew Brady, because their work contained prime examples of early forms of documentary practices and “allowed artists to claim a connection to an established...national tradition” (Corwin, 2010, 4). Photography as historiography, therefore, was a reliable ‘national tradition’ which enabled de Antonio to connect the audience to a history which was largely hidden from them.

It should be no surprise that Mathew Brady was admired by the photographers of de Antonio’s generation. Brady knew at the start of the war, before the First Battle of Bull Run, that to photograph the Civil War was to serve as its historian. In 1861, he proposed a plan to President Lincoln, Alan Pinkerton, and Secretary of War Simon Cameron to create a photographic history of the war for its duration (Horan, 1960, 37). The U.S. government declined to support Brady’s plan. Had the plan been approved, the resulting volumes and exhibitions could have been read as an early template for documentary war cinema. A determined Brady went into the field anyway, supported by colleagues with military connections, and found himself in silent competition with other documentarians: newspaper sketch artists, practicing an

established craft which rose to popularity in the United States and Europe during the 1840s and 1850s (see also endnote 6). An article in the May 2012 issue of *National Geographic*, however, describes a problem with Civil War era sketches, one that set the photography of Brady and others apart from the illustrators' work. Illustrations were subject to manipulation in the engraving process, "censoring images considered too negative or graphic and altering drawings to make them more stirring or upbeat" (Katz, 2012, 54). By contrast, photographs could not be manipulated in the same way as sketch illustrations. It is true that Brady and his cohorts staged their photographs. Soldiers, both dead and alive, were posed in a manner to achieve a certain emotional effect, and other photograph techniques, such as double exposure, were employed – resulting in a form of photography known as "spirit photography."<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, photographers could only stage the what was in front of the camera before the shutter closed, and the result was a facsimile of real life, one whose meaning at the time the picture was taken could not be significantly manipulated in post.

Although Civil War photography can be seen as providing verisimilitude in contrast to sketch illustrations, it must be understood that photography is still a practice in which representation is shaped by personal politics, and this was just as true during the Civil War as it is now in the digital age. Joel Snyder writes that while "Civil War photographs have been considered non-mediated copies of the facts they are supposed to represent", the photographs were, in fact, "both representations and presentations....made by men who worked with definable attitudes and goals to satisfy the needs and expectations of the broad but determinate audiences" (Snyder, 1976, 17). Civil War photography can be seen as a template for the documentary war film of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The imagination and sentimentality of the photographer provided an organizing principle for the composition and subject



matter contained in the photographs. In this regard, Brady can be seen as a prototype for the documentary filmmaker, as his life is the story of both a skilled artist and a man motivated by profit and self-promotion (Snyder, 1976, 17). War photography, however, exists in a category separate from other visual representations on the ground that the images are perceived as historical documents. They offer a historical narrative based on the promise of truth, mirroring the real world.



Fig. 1.9. The last images from the Dien Bien Phu aftermath montage from *In the Year of the Pig* (1968).

A century later, de Antonio would combine Brady's use of image-as-historical-document with established cinematic techniques for manipulating these images to conform to a historical narrative. One sequence roughly twenty minutes into his film employs the montage technique to counter the official historical narrative, to provide a history of what "is far away...hidden from view" and acts as a "social investigation [of a] vexed issue". Images of the grave stones of the French dead from Dien Bien Phu and footage of coffins, draped with the French flag and hoisted onto departing ships, are shown in a slow montage to the sound of *La Marseillaise* played on a *dan nguet* (Southeast Asian stringed instrument). At the end of the sequence, de Antonio shows footage of a Viet Minh soldier playing a flute for French soldiers departing Vietnam (Fig. 1.9). De Antonio abruptly jump cuts to a still image of the flutist (zoomed in to a closer shot), and then holds on the image as the soundtrack plays the

last few notes of the anthem. Then de Antonio cuts to footage of a boat leaving Vietnam (Fig. 1.9). The purpose of the sequence is to signify Dien Bien Phu as the end of one era and the start of another, but the singling out of the image of the flutist provides an explicit interpretation from de Antonio on this particular history: the Vietnamese left standing at the end become the masters of their own destiny.



Fig. 1.10. The final shot of *In the Year of the Pig* (1968), a photonegative image of a statue from Gettysburg National Military Park.

*In the Year of the Pig* presents its images as found footage; de Antonio acts as a detective-filmmaker, presenting visual evidence to both complement and illustrate the written dissent of Noam Chomsky, Abbie Hoffman, and Allen Ginsberg. The ending of de Antonio's film circles back on itself, both stylistically and narratively. Just before the end credits roll, the image of a statue from Gettysburg National Military Park (Fig. 1.10), first seen during the film's opening credits, is shown again as a still frame, this time in the form of a photo negative, accompanied by the "Battle Hymn of the Republic". The "outcry within [the photo's] compositional structure" is that the viewer is witnessing a vicious cycle in history, from the defeat of the French early in the film to the defeat of the American military in an unwritten epilogue to the film

(Hariman & Lucaites, 2007, 145). The final image is the payoff of Bruzzi's characterization of the film's opening sequence. The use of a photo negative, rather than a developed one, foreshadows that many more will die before this is all over (Bruzzi, 2000, 27).

### I Lost Restrepo



Fig. 1.11. The opening title sequence of *Restrepo* (2010).

While the influence of Civil War photography can be felt in documentary war films, another mode of historical inscription from the Civil War provided a template for narration in recent films concerning conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan: the writings of Civil War soldiers. In the run-up to the Persian Gulf War, General Norman Schwarzkopf advised his staff to watch Ken Burns's PBS documentary series *The Civil War* (1990). "[Schwarzkopf] thought that, if anything, the series had reminded him that the soldiers were real human beings on both sides and not just arrows on a general's map", recalled Burns over a decade later.<sup>13</sup> Burns's documentary, which begins with an Oliver Wendell Holmes quote stating that the war's participants had shared an "incommunicable experience", employs both Civil War photography and

testimonials from soldiers, generals, slaves, politicians, civilians, and a host of others to provide an organic and contemporary relation to the past through the form of the traditional historical documentary. The use of letters and journal entries is critical to Burns's documentary, as they provide what he describes as history from both "the bottom up" and "the top down" in order to humanize an event so distant to a contemporary audience. Grunt documentaries, such as *Restrepo* and the award-winning Danish Afghanistan War documentary *Armadillo* (directed by Janus Metz, Denmark, 2010), evoke the humanizing effect of soldier testimonials in a way which is comparable to the use of soldier diaries in Ken Burns's film.

*Restrepo* begins with a prologue sequence on a train in Italy. Young soldiers in civilian attire, heads shaved, are seated around a table in one of the coaches, engaged in manly banter, enjoying their last moments on Western soil before shipping out to Afghanistan. One soldier, Juan "Doc" Restrepo, turns to the camera, breaking the fourth wall, and says, "We're going to war". This line is then repeated again and again as an echo that gets softer and softer as the scene transitions, through a dissolve, from Restrepo's face to a dusty, arid valley in Afghanistan. What is striking about this opening scene is how much it resembles scenes from other post-9/11 war films, in particular the digital videos of Angel Salazar in Brian De Palma's *Redacted* (2007). The opening credit sequence which follows, long-distance shots of helicopters taking the soldiers into the mountains of Afghanistan's Kunar province to their deployment position in the Korengal Valley, is an explicit citation of films such as *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) (Fig. 1.11). This visual allusion to *Black Hawk Down* and *Apocalypse Now* clearly links this documentary to familiar narrative war films. The use of rock music, however, a memorable feature of these war films, is replaced here with regional, tribal music from Afghanistan as if to remind the viewer

of the otherness of the world which the soldiers are entering. *Restrepo*'s opening establishes the narrative and visual strategy which will be employed for the remainder of the film: a documentary film constructed as a feature film, with previous war films as its reference points.

The fact that documentaries employ feature film conventions, in order to hit specific emotional chords, is hardly a profound (or recent) observation. Previous war documentaries and previous narrative war films figure largely in the construction of Hetherington and Jünger's film. How its form reaches back to pre-cinema narrative forms and aesthetic modes, interacting with a deeper layer of genre memory, is what I am interested in here. The written testimony of a soldier's individual war experience was an essential component in the writing of the history of the Civil War and has provided a resource for historical analysis. Later transcribed into a cinematic mode, the form of testimonial played a defining role in narrative feature war films, as in Chris Taylor's voice-over narration in Oliver Stone's Vietnam War film *Platoon* (1986). In *Restrepo*, the documentary 'talking head' tactic, used heavily in de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig*, can be read as a specific act of bearing witness, a narrative mode that can be traced back to the diary and epistolary forms of the nineteenth century. The soldiers in *Restrepo*, the film's talking heads, are witnesses to an Afghanistan War not captured by the mainstream media: a narrative of the war that evokes "the combination of boredom and frustration with the problems of combat with a faceless enemy" and filmed using "new technologies to get close to the soldiers' experience" (Barker, 2011, 27).

The narrative strategy of early war films drew upon soldier diaries, and this approach continued through representations of World War II and the Vietnam War. The use of

cross-cutting between the battlefield and the home front, as early as Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and as recently as Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* (2001), and the use of voice-over narration, in the form of a letter to the home front, over deployment and fighting—as in Edward Zwick's 1989 *Glory*, Oliver Stone's 1986 *Platoon*, and Terrence Malick's 1998 *The Thin Red Line*—are two cinematic tactics which bear the legacy of the Civil War soldier diary. The Iraq War films have also retained these narrative strategies by recoding soldier testimony through the digital technology which shaped our perception of that war: Mike Deerfield's cell-phone video from *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), for example, and Angel Salazar's digital video documentary in *Redacted* (2007), both examples to which I will later return.

To understand how *Restrepo*'s soldier testimonials present a critique of the Afghanistan War and news media coverage, it is important to consider the fact that Sebastian Jünger and the late Tim Hetherington have been war journalists. The tradition of war correspondence is a salient feature of modern and pre-modern warfare, and studies of war reportage and intended audiences are revealing. Elbert N. S. Thompson writes that at the start of World War I “the newspapers...were more ready than any other for the demands placed upon them”. The military and the citizenry had to be mobilized but the apparatus for war journalism was already in place (Thompson, 1920, 93). Thompson cites the coverage of the English Civil War (1642–1651) as one of the earliest examples of war journalism in human history, as “the public, bitterly partisan for one cause or another, was eager to be informed” (ibid.). Reports from the battlefield were doctored to garner support for a particular faction, written out in document form on tablets, and read aloud in town squares by appointed officials. Phillip Knightley's study of American Civil War journalism found that bitter partisanship was the rule: the *New York Times* and *Harpers Weekly*

were pro-Lincoln (hence pro-war/pro-Federal) publications and the *Pittsburgh Gazette* and the *Chicago Times* were ‘Copperhead newspapers’, anti-Lincoln and pro-Stephan Douglas (later pro-George McClellan in the 1864 election). Yet, despite figures of as many as five hundred Northern correspondents in the field (and the *New York Herald* spending one million dollars over the course of the war), correspondents were not interested in accounts of the war from a soldier’s perspective (Knightey, 1975, 20). Journals were pre-occupied with military strategy and “cowed by censorship, determined to maintain morale, and poorly serviced by the majority of [their] correspondents” (Knightey, 1975, 25). Cultural depictions of the Civil War in the post-war period, however, and indeed much of America’s cultural memory of the war, were instead formed by first-person narrative accounts which began appearing in published form within ten years of the conclusion of the war: letter anthologies, diaries, and oral history pertaining to the Civil War contended with the record left behind by journalists, and were regarded as providing verisimilitude and an authoritative, if still partial, account of the conflict which shaped the cultural memory of the war.

The importance of first-person accounts in war fiction and film traditions can be seen in a number of examples. Stephen Crane, a writer and reporter, wrote the novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), the source for the 1951 John Huston film, crafted from the stories of Civil War veterans who Crane had interviewed, and narrated in the first person. Terrence Malick’s World War II film *The Thin Red Line* (1998) is similarly based on the work of Pacific campaign veteran James Jones’s 1962 novel. Many Vietnam War films are also shaped by first-hand experience: Michael Herr’s autobiographical thesis *Dispatches* (1976) informed the narration of both *Apocalypse Now* and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), and Oliver Stone’s *Platoon* (1986) is

autobiographical in many respects. Looking beyond the novel-to-war-film paradigm, works such as John Huston's documentary *Let There Be Light* (1946), banned until 1981, use the soldier-as-witness perspective to add an extra layer of text to a history which the public experienced through newspapers and newsreels (Fig. 1.12). The construction of history and the shaping of cultural memory consists of layered histories which contribute to and complement the broader story.



Fig. 1.12. John Huston's *Let There Be Light* (1946), a non-fiction film commissioned by the Army Corps of Engineers that documents the treatment and rehabilitation of soldiers suffering from PTSD.

While the unrehearsed immediacy of soldiers' testimonies in *Restrepo* is distinct from the Civil War diaries and novels of war veterans, they nevertheless serve the same function. The testimonials in *Restrepo* leave behind a first-person history of the war which adds another layer of history to the distanced, third-person history currently being written by journalists and academics. The soldier-witness as a narrative device is both a documentary convention, the 'talking head', and a continuation of the soldier-as-alternative-historian approach in earlier war films.





Fig. 1.13 Specialist Misha “Pemble” Pemble-Belkin providing testimony in *Restrepo* (2010).

*The first friend I lost was Vimota [sic]...and then, a month after that, I lost Restrepo.*  
– Specialist Misha “Pemble” Pemble-Belkin.

What is interesting in Pemble’s testimony about Juan “Doc” Restrepo’s death, described twelve minutes into the film, is that he states that “I” and not “we” lost Restrepo. The viewer is drawn inward, from a story of a unit to the story of individuals with their own histories to impart. What is also revealing is the lighting and composition of the talking-head segments. Each soldier is filmed against a black backdrop and lit with one key light from one side only (Fig. 1.13). The witnesses are not provided with make-up or costumes. They appear as they choose to appear. The film’s narrators appear to us cloaked in shadow, as if they are battlefield ghosts imparting a secret history not revealed through the news media.

Captain Dan Kearney, the first of the film’s talking heads, for example, states that he did not read up on the Korengal Valley before deployment, as he wanted a fresh perspective. Before leaving, he was advised that posts in the Korengal take fire every day. On the one hand, Kearney’s testimony performs the same function as the

traditional Hollywood first act: the character sets the scene, establishes the story's conflict, and proposes a solution ("just go out and kill them"). On the other hand, the spectator is drawn into the war as both an individual and as part of a collective experience. Kearney removes the spectator straight away from their relationship with the limited, third-person narration of news media coverage.

Just as pathos is provided by the images of war—in Civil War photographs, narrative feature war films, and other documentaries, like *In the Year of the Pig*, for example—soldier testimonials, the act of witnessing, provides war stories with pathos from a different angle. Grunt documentaries, like *Restrepo*, *Armadillo*, Deborah Scranton's Iraq War documentary *The War Tapes* (SenArt Films, 2006), for example, rely on their promise of authenticity and audience expectation of monstrous events (Pogodda 2012). The narration of the talking heads (witnesses) in these documentaries provides these stories with stories with the pathos required to provide a clear narrative thread for audiences to navigate through the chaos of war. As in other fictional war film, some of which I will later discuss, we can see a sense of community formed by a diverse group of individuals, we can see the pain from the losses witnessed by the soldiers, and we can see the soldiers longing for their lives at home, all of which are manifest in *Restrepo* as a result of the pathos provided by the testimonials. Through a comparison between the testimonials present in *Restrepo* and the soldier testimonials found in Civil War epistolary modes, we can see how formulas of pathos operate just as effectively from first-person narration in war cinema as they do through the images of these films.

*When you hear someone's hit, you start going through your head...all the people that are closest to you.* – Staff Sergeant Joshua McDonoagh, *Restrepo* (2010)

*Advancing a little further on, we saw General Albert Sidney Johnston surrounded by his staff....We saw some little commotion among those who surrounded him, but we did not know at the time that he was dead. The fact was kept from the troops.* –

Private Sam Watkins, 3rd Tennessee Infantry, The Battle of Shiloh, Tennessee (April 6, 1862)

The death of Doc Restrepo was never captured on film. The death of General Albert Sidney Johnston (of the Confederate States of America) was never photographed, although it was later sketched for Confederate newspapers. Their battlefield deaths are encapsulated mainly by the testimonies of those who were there. For Paul Virilio, war is a way of seeing, but war is also a way of hearing. *Restrepo's* Caldwell testifies that the shooting of Doc was “called in”, and Cortez, Pemples, and Caldwell both recall seeing his injuries afterwards. Doc was alive when he was taken to a helicopter but bled to death in-flight. Despite never witnessing this scene, assuming that footage of it actually exists, the audience can easily reconstruct it in their minds. Familiar scenes from other war films aid in this re-imagining. For example, in a scene discussed earlier, the character of Specialist Brown (Erik King), in Brian De Palma's *Casualties of War* (1989), is shot in the neck by the Viet Cong and bleeds to death in the rescue helicopter. In a more contemporary war setting, Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* contains another example with the death of Corporal Jamie Smith (Chris Hofheimer) from a femoral artery wound, in a manner similar to what Doc Restrepo may have experienced.

The relating of Doc Restrepo's death is linked to the reporting of battlefield deaths in Civil War diaries. Many soldiers never witness the death of a comrade or leader amidst the chaos of battle. They only learn about it later through their fellow soldiers. What separates *Restrepo* from the Civil War diaries, however, is the speed at which the news of death travels. The soldiers are both the participants in their own personal war film and the audience of that same film, as the communication technology used in the field informs them of a soldier's death very quickly. Contemporary war films, including documentaries, use their soldier-witnesses to present the horrors of war as a shared experience, one that cannot be escaped by placement at opposite ends of a battlefield.

What becomes clear when reading Civil War soldier diaries, and indeed the diaries and novels of soldiers from other wars, is that inscribing the war experience was not a passive activity. When one's only mode for bearing witness is writing by hand, encamped off the battlefield, more time and thought is devoted to the prose. Consider, for instance, a letter from Samuel J. English, written to his mother after the First Battle of Bull Run, July 1861. Here he attempts to recreate, in his own words, the chaos of battle as Union troops fled the field:

*The [Rhode Island] regiments...were drawn into a line to cover the retreat, but an officer galloped wildly into the column crying the enemy is upon us [sic], and off they started like a flock of sheep, every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost; while the rebels' shot and shell fell like rain among our exhausted troops. As we gained the cover of woods the stampede became even more frightful, for the baggage wagons and ambulances became*

*entangled with the artillery, and rendered every scene more dreadful than battle....* (Simpson, Sears, & Sheehan-Dean, 2011, 493–494)

In *Restrepo*, Pambles speaks about relaying his combat experience to his family:

*To my family, I never really told them much until about half way into the deployment. I didn't tell them when...Restrepo got killed. When Restrepo got killed, it was a few days before my Mom's birthday also. So I had to suck it up. When I called my Mom on her birthday, [I had to] act like everything is OK, and say "hey, Mom, happy birthday."*

There are two key differences between the two testimonies which can actually help us to better understand their commonalities: first. Pambles's prose (or speech, rather) is quite informal, as speaking extemporaneously to the camera is more of a casual activity than writing a letter or diary entry. Second, Samuel English's mother would have had no other reference point for imagining a combat situation other than what her son had written. Pambles's mother may or may not have been alive at the time of the Vietnam War, when news coverage was more graphic than that of the Persian Gulf War or the Iraq War, but it may be safe to assume that she had seen Hollywood war films, providing a memory bank of images ready to be re-edited to her son's war stories. Again, *Restrepo* returns to the idea that the connection between the genre memory of the narrative war film and the war documentary is inescapable, as war films have informed our imagining of combat. Furthermore, this approach to *Restrepo* distinguishes itself from de Antonio's film, a documentary which does not appear to reference World War II combat films or other previous war films.

*Now to begin with the order of battle. I have no right to criticize it in terms. It will be enough to describe it. The uncovered space I have spoken of was the battle ground. Part of Baker's brigade was drawn up on the right flank, on the edge of the wood, with the 15th. The rest was drawn across the opening, back towards the river, 30 feet from the top of the bank. 15 feet behind them the 318 men of our regiment were drawn up in a second, parallel line, under command of Col. Lee. The whole was the command of Gen. Baker. The two howitzers in front entirely unprotected. The enemy in the woods.* – The diary of Henry Livermore Abbott, Battle of Balls Bluff, Virginia, October 1861 (Simpson, Sears, & Sheehan-Dean, 2011, 577)

Each entry in Henry Livermore Abbott's diary begins with "Dear Papa", indicating that the work was written with a clear recipient in mind, Henry's father Josiah. What is also interesting about Abbott's depiction is how his prose captures the topography of the battlefield and troop and artillery deployment in detail. In setting the scene to be easily played out by Josiah's imagination, Henry's retelling of the battle can be seen as the blueprint for filming the combat scenes of future war films. Just as it has been argued that the visual form of the early war film drew upon the panorama paintings of the nineteenth century, I am also arguing that the Civil War soldier diaries and letters have contributed to the visual construction of battlefields, as they provide clear first-person vantage points around which to build representations. For example, Kevin Jarre's screenplay for the Civil War film *Glory* is based on Colonel Robert Gould Shaw's personal letters, one of which describes his experiences at the Battle of Antietam (featured in the film) (Canby, 1989), and Griffith drew from first person accounts of Civil War veterans, namely Horace Porter's *Campaigning with Grant* (1897), to provide authenticity to the battle scenes in *The Birth of a Nation*

(Wills, 2007, 12). *Restrepo* retains these vantage points which Civil War diaries provide in order to keep the spectator from being overwhelmed by the intensity of combat.

Where *Restrepo* is more in line with films like *The Hurt Locker*, however, is in how the spectator's sense of battlefield topography is skewed. Hetherington and Jünger treat the viewer to expansive wide-shots of the Korengal Valley, seeming to go on forever, but the descriptions we get from the soldiers suggest that it is a 'no man's land'. In one scene, Captain Kearney points out a position in the distance to be watched for Taliban activity ("top of that [outpost]"), but the audience never sees what Kearney is pointing to, as his body, in the foreground, blocks the view of his arm pointing. Hetherington and Jünger use the soldier-witnesses to navigate the audience through the images but they deny the audience total control over the spectacle.

*But, oh Sarah, if the dead can come back to this earth, and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you—in the garish day, and the darkest night—amidst your happiest scenes and gloomiest hours—always, always; and, if the soft breeze fans your cheek, it shall be my breath; or the cool air cools your throbbing temples, it shall be my spirit passing by. —*

Sullivan Ballou's letter to his wife Sarah, June 1861, a week before the Battle of Bull Run, in which Ballou was killed (Simpson, Sears, & Sheehan-Dean, 2011, 453).

In contrast with this letter is a scene in *Restrepo* in which Specialist Sterling is on duty as a machine gunner, watching over the valley from Base Restrepo. He is

communicating with another soldier through a walkie-talkie. To break the monotony of the moment, the other soldier enquires after Sterling's family:

Sterling: *Good, they're pretty good....It was a good time. We hung out at the ranch.*

Other soldier: *Your family has a ranch?*

Sterling: *Of course....A ranch just with land, you know, gates....some wildlife that you shoot at...like this [place].*

Other soldier: *Yeah, but we're not hunting animals, just people.*

Sterling: *Hearts and minds.*

Other soldier: *Yeah, we'll take their hearts and we'll take their minds.*

Robert Eberwein notes that the war film is concerned with “the activities of the participants off the battlefield” and the “effects of war on human relationships” (Eberwein, 2010, 45). Sullivan Ballou's letter demonstrates that certain aspects of Eberwein's war film criteria were present in the writings of Civil War soldiers. Ballou contextualizes his impending sacrifice in deeply spiritual terms and links his potential demise to his role as a husband and father. Sterling's conversation makes clear that a soldier's family life informs his view of the battlezone. This point further illustrates how Hetherington and Jünger have crafted a documentary in the mold of the narrative war feature, as they are deeply concerned with the activities of the soldiers off the battlefield and the effects of their deployment on their relationships with those off the battlefield. Moments such as Sterling's scene, described above, and the talking-head segments allow for these emotions to manifest, despite being different in tone compared to Civil War diaries and letters. Pembles, for example, in one of his talking-head segments, describes his upbringing in Eugene, Oregon, by a family with strong



counter-culture connections. He was not allowed to play with toy guns or violent video games as a child, and he finds it difficult to reconcile his chosen path of military service with his family history. These aspects of *Restrepo*'s testimonies are in service of the familiar war film trope that war's effects are never limited to the battlefield. William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978), and Paul Haggis's *In the Valley of Elah* (2007) make this point blatantly clear, just as the soldiers of the Civil War were all too painfully aware of this fact and used their writings to make it known.

How they must seem to their mothers



Fig. 1.14. *Alcantara, asleep while stationed in the Korengal Valley, 2008*, Tim Hetherington, *Sleeping Soldiers*, Yossi Milos Gallery, New York, April 2012.

In April 2012, the Yossi Milos Gallery in New York City and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., mounted an exhibition of photos from the late Tim Hetherington, titled *Sleeping Soldiers*. As reported by Blake Gopnik of *The Daily Beast*: “Hetherington wanted to reveal how they must seem to their mothers: innocent, vulnerable, and, in their turned-off minds at last, somewhere very far from the war” (Gopnik, 2012). While Hetherington probably does present the soldiers as “they must seem to their mothers”, the reality is that the soldiers are not exactly “turned-off” in their minds, nor are they “far from the war”, neither in this art exhibition nor in real life. The photos, shown as a video of successive still images, accompanied by sound effects of grenade explosions and soldiers’ voices, as reported by *National Public Radio*, creates a “surreal, dream-like soundtrack” (NPR, 2012). This exhibition serves as a point of convergence for the two pre-cinema traditions which I have discussed; war photography, capturing in a single frame the effects of war (imprinted on the

photograph's subject), and the soldier-as-witness, providing the story of war with emotional depth missing from traditional war reportage.

In *Sleeping Soldiers*, the inner world of the soldier, including memories of his life off the battlefield, becomes intertwined with the violence he faces on the battlefield, an aspect of the Civil War diaries which is manifest in both *Restrepo* and the exhibition. The photographs also operate in a way which is similar to de Antonio's images in *In the Year of the Pig*. They are miniature events against a larger historical canvas which provide "emotional" facts which are otherwise hidden from view (Corwin, 2010, 3). What *Sleeping Soldiers* ultimately highlights is a point where *In the Year of the Pig* and *Restrepo* converge, the sedimented memories of Civil War era modes of representation. Although many of the aims of de Antonio's film differ radically from Hetherington and Jünger's work, traces of Civil War modes of representation in both films have lent them a common provenance in historical traditions which combine art with the act of witnessing.

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#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Consider the influence which war documentaries have had on some of the most emblematic fictional war films of our time: Eugene Jones's *A Face of War* (1967) influenced Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and the surviving newsreels of the Normandy invasion informed the look of Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). For further information, see Debra Ramsay's "Inspiring the World to Remember" from *Through a Glass Darkly: American Media and the Memory of World War II* (forthcoming doctoral thesis, 2012), pp.89–143.

<sup>2</sup> Although war photography began in the Crimean War, the photography of the American Civil War is seminal to any discussion of the history of war photography, as photographers such as Mathew Brady and Timothy O'Sullivan provided more brutal images of the war than those of the Crimean War; photographs from the Crimean War relied on romantic iconography (Fig. 5.3), echoed in Lord Tennyson's poetry, whereas Civil War photographs showed images of the dead and wounded on the battlefield (Bolloch, 2004, 9) (Fig. 5.4). Also, it was not a coincidence that the copyright act amendment, which extended copyright protection to photographs, was passed at the war's end in 1865; war photography was "based on mechanical skill...[and was] a creative field of original authorship", and thus serves as a pre-cinema paradigm for the blending of artistic and documentary representations of war (ibid).

<sup>3</sup> Though many scholars locate the Spanish-American War as the origin of the war film, it is difficult to deny, after close inspection, that the Civil War confirms Paul Virilio's observation that advances in war technology and war cinema go hand-in-hand, as the still photographer, the precursor to the motion picture photographer, plotted his approach to capturing the war based on the new technology which shaped it. The prominence of wide-angle shots to capture vast battlefield landscapes and the choice of

subjects, low-ranking soldiers encamped in anticipation for battle or strewn about the battlefield as a gruesome reminder that the battles reported in the newspapers carried a human cost, are but some of these approaches.

<sup>4</sup> The term “grunt documentary” is a term developed by Patricia Aufderheide to describe war documentaries that “evoke the combination of boredom and frustration with the problems of combat with a faceless enemy” and “use new technologies to get close to soldiers’ experience.” (Barker, 2011, 27) For further reading, see Aufderheide’s article “Your country, my country: how films about the Iraq War constructs publics” in *Frameworks* (vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 56-65).

<sup>5</sup> The images in de Antonio’s film pre-date the Tet Offensive and the publication of Eddie Adam’s famous *Saigon Execution* photograph, two events that are credited as turning public opinion against the war.

<sup>6</sup> See Friedrich A. Kittler’s “Film” in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford University Press, 1999; original 1986). In this chapter, Kittler links Etienne-Jules Marey’s “chronophotographic gun”, a camera capable of taking twelve consecutive shots per second, to the Gatling gun, one of the earliest machine guns, first used during the American Civil War.

<sup>7</sup> For further reading on the change in public attitude towards warfare in the wake of Civil War era photography, see W. Fletcher Thompson’s *The Image of War: The Pictorial Reporting of The American Civil War* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960). Before the Civil War, America’s imagination of war was rooted in the highly popular paintings and portraits of John Trumbull (1756–1843) and Charles Wilson Peale (1741–1827), paintings of the American Revolution (e.g., the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown and the signing of the Declaration of Independence, shown on the back of the two-dollar bill) which emphasised the heroism and dash of its participants. The Civil War saw the rise of illustrated newspapers, influenced by European illustrated publications, which featured battlefield sketches and, later, photography (*Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, *Harper’s Weekly*, and *The New York Illustrated News*).

<sup>8</sup> After the completion of *Rush to Judgment* (1967), de Antonio’s critical examination of the Warren Commission’s investigation of the Kennedy assassination, de Antonio chose the modern-day plight of the Native Americans as his next documentary subject. If this film had been made, it is plausible that a similar style and narrative focus would have been employed as was seen in *In the Year of the Pig*. Nevertheless, de Antonio turned to the subject of Vietnam, as, with a few notable exceptions, American television and documentary films supported the administration’s position. In 1965, the Department of Defense released *Why Vietnam?*, required viewing for all G.I.s shipping out to Vietnam, and with ten thousand prints of this film in circulation in a variety of other contexts, it became one of the first documentaries about Vietnam to be seen in American homes (Lewis, 2000, 79). In 1968, the Department of Defense, through the U.S. Information Agency (a 1960s mimic of the O.W.I.) released *Vietnam! Vietnam!* as a follow up to *Why Vietnam?*. The film was directed by John Ford and narrated by Charlton Heston.

<sup>9</sup> Other anti-war Vietnam documentaries which de Antonio may or may not have located in his preparation for his film include Beryl Fox’s *The Mills of the Gods* (Canada, 1965), *Saigon* (1967), and *The Last Reflections on a War* (1968); Junichi Ushiyama’s *With a South Vietnamese Marine Battalion* (Japan, 1965); and footage from the BBC-produced *World in Action* series, which would later be compiled into a single documentary for the Cannes film festival.

<sup>10</sup> For further information, see “A Short History of Photography” in *Germany: The New Photography, 1927–33* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), and “The Author as Producer” in Benjamin’s *Reflections: Essay, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*.

<sup>11</sup> See Vertov’s *Kino-Eye Manifesto* (originally published in 1919). For further readings, see Ian Christie and Richard Taylor’s *The Film Factory Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896–1939* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Spirit photograph, developed during the Civil War by a Bostonian photographer named William H. Mumler, used double exposure to make it appear as though the ghosts of dead soldiers were appearing behind their bereaved relatives. For further reading, see Louis Kaplan’s *The Strange Case of William Mumler, Spirit Photographer* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Ken Burns. *The Civil War: Part One*. DVD audio commentary track. Florentine Films, 2002 (original film release, 1990).

## Chapter Two

### **Tell me no lies: A reading of Brian De Palma's *Redacted* (2007) and *Casualties of War* (1989)**

*The [Samarra] rape also recalls "Casualties of War," Mr. De Palma's grievously misunderstood 1989 film about a similar incident in Vietnam. Both films walk a delicate line between moral investigation and exploitative sensationalism, and in both cases the measure of Mr. De Palma's artistic seriousness is his willingness to ask not only what it means to take part in an act of murderous sexual violence, but also what it means to represent it and to watch the representation. – A. O. Scott, Redacted, New York Times Film Review, November 16, 2007*

At a press conference during the 2007 New York Film Festival, Brian De Palma characterized his approach to his Iraq War film *Redacted* (Magnolia Pictures, 2007) as being driven by the fact that the “[Iraq War] has been so misrepresented in the major media....I keep on saying all the time ‘where are the pictures?’...The pictures that I saw [of] Vietnam got me out into the streets” (IFC News, 2007). In *Redacted*, a film depicting a war crime akin to the Haditha massacre—the murder of over twenty Iraqi civilians by American soldiers as ‘revenge’ for the death of one of their comrades by an improvised explosive device (IED)—De Palma provides *us* with ‘the pictures’, both real pictures and ones of his own creation, as an act of protest. The backlash against the film by right-wing critics, notably *FOX News*’s Bill O’Reilly before the film was even released, confirms the effectiveness of the film’s blunt anti-war message and its existence outside the parameters of an ‘acceptable narrative’ of the Iraq War experience.<sup>1</sup>

*Redacted* stands out amongst the current crop of post-9/11 war films in that it contains an unambiguous critique of the war supported by an effectively visceral visual interpretation. To better understand *Redacted*’s function and intentions within the canon of post-9/11 war cinema requires a comparison of the film to De Palma’s

previous war film. De Palma grappled with the same moral questions eighteen years earlier in a film about a different war and crafted in a different film language, *Casualties of War* (Columbia Pictures, 1989). De Palma endeavored to provoke a similar debate on warfare with *Redacted* as he did with *Casualties*, as well as provide a nearly identical commentary. Though both films are connected through intention, their representational registers are the product of their own respective filmmaking periods. *Redacted* is very much a part of a search by post-9/11 filmmakers for a meta-language sufficient to come to grips with the actual combat experience. What becomes clear by comparison is that his earlier approach to characters, narrative structure, and visuals does not—and perhaps could not—have the same impact on public discourse after 9/11 as *Casualties* had in its time. The viewer's distance from the conflict, physically and psychologically, and the role cinema plays in representing these events has changed dramatically since 1989. I argue that the earlier form of the Vietnam War film, exemplified in *Casualties*, is evoked only in order to be revised, rewritten for another conflict in which “the aesthetics of disappearance” seems to dominate—military technology and film technology operating hand-in-hand, obscuring individual anguish and sacrifice (Pisters, 2010, 233).

On the one hand, the two films share several striking characteristics: psychological doubling of characters, themes in support of an anti-war message, and the intention to provoke debate. These shared elements contribute to a similar end. Both films can be seen as a war-context metaphor for the duality of the American character. On the other hand, the differences between the two films are even more manifest. In this chapter, I will demonstrate the ways in which one style of war representation has changed radically in response to a period dominated by media technology and digital photography, a technology which tends to work hand-in-hand with military strategies

of disappearance and obscurity (Pisters, 2010, 233). Three prominent characteristics which separate *Redacted* from *Casualties* will contribute to an analysis of this stylistic shift: first, the different modes of representation, one accessible to the Vietnam War generation and the other to the Iraq War generation; second, character transformation to underscore anti-war themes; and third, the overall narrative structure of the screenplay. A reading of both *Casualties* and *Redacted* demonstrates that a linear storyline and conventional cinematic and photographic representations are inadequate tools for uncovering the real ‘pictures’ of the Iraq War.

I will begin by comparing *Casualties of War* and *Redacted* based on three cinematic criteria: narrative structure, the transformation of characters through combat, and visual style. The aim here is to illuminate why De Palma has, after 9/11, departed from a previous mode of filmmaking and engaged in a radically different approach. I argue that in *Redacted* De Palma rehearses the same narrative topic and themes as in *Casualties*, based on his argument that the Iraq War generation is repeating the errors of the Vietnam War. I also argue that he has radically revised the structuring of the narrative, diminishing the role of his characters, and that he has radically shifted his visual approach. This shift in direction constitutes a revision or rejection of the ‘New Hollywood’ narrative and visual approach. Furthermore, *Redacted* can be read as an acknowledgement that a graphic, *cinéma vérité* approach to ‘combat realism’—as embodied in *Casualties* and other war films (*Full Metal Jacket* and *Saving Private Ryan*)—is insufficient to project ‘combat realism’ in any meaningful sense, and cannot, at present, provide an explicit anti-war critique.

*Redacted* employs a fragmented, episodic narrative structure rather than a fluid and linear one; inconclusive character arcs, in which the characters are victims or

spectators of the narrative rather than providing its motivation; and a visual style dependent on multi-media interfaces, taking us closer to the heart of the action in a way that 35mm cinematography cannot. This analysis casts *Redacted* as a critical examination of both the Iraq War and American war mythology. It also underlines the incapacity of earlier film modes to represent contemporary combat experiences. Additionally, this analysis casts the film as a critique of conventional Hollywood filmmaking and highlights the film as De Palma's own form of self-criticism towards his approach in *Casualties of War*.

#### Iraq in fragments: De Palma's re-write of the war film narrative structure

*Casualties of War* is a story which, according to Cynthia J. Fuchs, "[casts] returning American veterans as repentant victims, struggling to make peace with themselves at last" (Fuchs, 1991, 34). According to this criterion, the film can be placed alongside Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* (Universal Pictures, 1989) or Hal Ashby's *Coming Home* (United Artists, 1978), so De Palma's film by no means sets a precedent for this particular narrative. What separates *Casualties* from previous Vietnam films is its deliberate investigation of what the victims are repenting over coupled with an explicit examination of the process that can lead a decent human being to such atrocities. De Palma, as Peter Rainer of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, "keeps returning to the scene of the crime" (Rainer, 2006). This is true of *Casualties* and, a year after Rainer's article was published, *Redacted* as well. The narrative structure of both films charts this course into chaos, but a different set of historical circumstances and a radically different set of representational codes complicate the presentation of character, the explanation of cause and effect, and the degree to which the film's themes serve as a critique of American military culture.



In an interview for *National Public Radio*, De Palma, when asked about how he approached the questions posed by the Haditha massacre, responded, “The question was answered in *Casualties of War*, and it was the same situation....Once you consider the circumstances under which these things happen...my movie tries to show how decent individuals can go so wrong” (National Public Radio, 2007). The plots of both films appear to be constructed around the path leading to atrocity. De Palma shows ‘how decent individuals go so wrong’ through psychological doubling of characters (which I will discuss later), but also through a deliberately structured three-act narrative. *Casualties of War*’s storyline is presented as a single flashback, invoking the post-traumatic stress documented in many Vietnam veterans, and is appropriate to the context of 1989, but the 2007 context provides little imaginative space for a convincing, harrowing flashback of events from the previous year. A depiction of the descent into moral breakdown in the post-9/11 world demands the perspective of each accountable source based on physical time. Hence, De Palma, as *Redacted*’s screenwriter, sees fit to take the viewer on a journey to atrocity through a fragmented and multi-voiced narration.

Explicit anti-war themes and intentions are present in both films. This stance can primarily be attributed to two factors: first, the films’ choice in plot subject-matter as a refutation of conventional American war mythology, and second, the films’ exploration of the impulse towards concealing war crimes. The Haditha massacre, the subject dramatized in *Redacted*, was an incident which was not only characterized by journalists as the ‘My Lai of the Iraq War’ (referring to the incident upon which *Casualties of War* is based), but also served as a continuation of a narrative that began with the Abu Ghraib incident; each event was characterized as a war atrocity

stemming from battle stress, alienation, and hatred fuelled by paranoia. This string of incidents alone represents an unraveling of the traditional American war mythology, revitalized after 9/11—one that characterizes American warfare as a glorious endeavor for the greater good of America and humanity. De Palma's Iraq War film puts this into a dramatic context similar to his Vietnam film's characterization of the atrocities of that war and their relation to war mythology. Both *Redacted* and *Casualties of War* frame their anti-war message by investigating the impulse to conceal these crimes—a silence rooted in both troop fraternity and the reluctance of the high brass to admit wrongdoing. The narratives of both films comment on the national narrative by mirroring the characters' story with the story of twentieth century America. Along these lines, *Redacted* and *Casualties of War* exist topically as anti-war films, sharing broad narrative similarities but differing on specific terms.

*Casualties of War*, scripted by David Rabe (himself a Vietnam veteran), follows a traditional three-act structure, told through a linear flashback in the third person, centered on a clearly-defined protagonist, Private Max Eriksson (Michael J. Fox). Eriksson provides the central focus for the film, as he appears in every scene, but he provides no personal voice-over reminiscent of the central characters of Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (Warner Brothers, 1987) and Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (Orion Pictures, 1986). The first act of the film focuses on Eriksson's combat experience as a descent into a nightmare scenario—war shaping a righteous bond between comrades, the old war mythology well-understood through World War II era films, such as *Bataan* and *Action in the North Atlantic*, dissolving under the weight of shared combat experience and moral dilemmas. This is achieved by our never witnessing Eriksson's boot camp training, his arrival in Vietnam, or his initial meeting with his fellow soldiers. The first sequence of Eriksson as a soldier in the film thrusts the

viewer into the thick of battle—an ambush upon Eriksson’s company during a night patrol. This choice of exposition indicates a morality play with a narrower focus than previous Vietnam films with well-crafted character background stories (e.g., *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket*)—we never learn where Eriksson’s comrades hail from or what they did before the war. During this sequence, Eriksson, attempting to take cover from enemy fire, falls into a Viet Cong tunnel and is saved by Sergeant Tony Meserve (Sean Penn)—an act affirming the ‘no man left behind’ maxim of the World War II combat film and later films, such as *Black Hawk Down* (Dreamworks, 2001). In the next sequence, Eriksson and his company, while attempting to develop a fraternal bond, are again ambushed, this time in broad daylight at the edge of a rice-paddy field on the outskirts of a rural Vietnamese village. The trauma felt by the soldiers (and the audience) over the death of Corporal Brown (Erik King) in this scene prompts the characters to question another American war myth: the soldier as an agent of ‘good’ and the ‘American moral compass’. The shared anger of the company over “Brownie’s” death draws us into the second act, which centers on Eriksson’s attempt to preserve his sense of right and wrong and his resistance to a blind-revenge narrative.

*Casualties of War*’s second and third acts concern themselves with the process that takes an ordinary soldier down a destructive path—“how decent individuals go so wrong”, as De Palma observed—and the futility of attempting to right these wrongs within the military structure. Members of Eriksson’s platoon, under the instructions of Meserve, kidnap a Vietnamese girl (Than Thi Oanh, played by Thuy Thu Le) from her village and take her on the scouting mission to which they have been assigned. During this assignment, the girl’s captors repeatedly rape and finally murder her, crimes which Eriksson refuses to participate in and attempts to stop, drawing violent

disdain from his fellow soldiers. The sequences which follow, in the third act, concern Eriksson's attempt to see that justice is served. The obstacle facing Eriksson's mission is not merely the vehemence of the soldiers with whom he served but the denial of his superior officers who have the authority to prosecute these crimes. This situation is embodied in a scene where Eriksson tells Meserve, while confronting him and his fellow soldiers in the barracks, "I've told them. They don't care". In the end, justice is served, and the guilty parties are given prison sentences by a military tribunal. We are, however, left with lingering doubt as to how effective this 'justice' will be overall and whether or not the soldiers that are found guilty will actually serve their sentences. It has been suggested that America, in the midst of the Iraq War, never learned the lessons of the Vietnam War, and it is this idea which prompted De Palma to return to the same story, with a nearly identical third act, in *Redacted*. The difference between the two films resides in how their third acts conclude and the imposed structures which take the spectator to the resolution.

*Redacted* is told in episodic chapters, testimonies culled from different sources and different viewpoints and through different media modes: mock interviews and confessionals shot in the barracks on digital video cameras provide us with an insight into the development of characters; a mini-camera fixed to a soldier's helmet allows us to watch, uninhibited, quotidian military routine; security camera footage grants us the ability to eavesdrop on sensitive information. As the central plot concerns itself with a specific set of soldier characters, it becomes important to separate two different modes of narration presented in each episode and the functions these modes serve within the overall narrative. We can call these two perspectives *internal* and *external*.

The *internal perspective* is transcribed solely through the point of view of the soldiers themselves—an expression of the film’s primary narrative line. The first encounter of this mode is Angel Salazar’s documentary film—a constant work in progress—a hand-held camera shot panning around the barracks, interviewing soldiers, and providing both visual and audio commentary on the mundane daily life of the soldier. Though the testimonies are supplied by actors, these ‘documentary’ sequences are intended to provide us with ‘candid’ portraits that the news media cannot provide—a narrative mode acting as an anti-establishment and anti-war critique. For example, in an early sequence, Diaz attempts to elicit an honest opinion of army life from fellow soldier Gabe Blix (Kel O’Neil), who resists at first, arguing that any filming is from ‘the media’ and that Diaz will make a “commie rendition of the mission”. As the setting and circumstances change, so do Salazar’s, and others’, visual modes for transmitting the narrative. Salazar and Lawyer McCoy (Rob Devaney) place hidden mini-cameras on their uniforms and helmets to record point-of-view shots from their patrols. These two approaches shift us from the invisible, third-person narration mode and enable us to appear to actually experience, rather than witness as cinema spectators, a realistic first-person narration.

The ‘candid camera’ mode, however, is not the only visual mode De Palma employs for the internal perspective. The variety of media modes increases as we progress from the first to the second and third acts. Two sequences involve McCoy using the Internet to attempt to right the wrongs he has witnessed, a near re-enactment of *Casualties of War*’s third act. During a Skype conversation with his father, himself a combat veteran, McCoy is instructed to remain silent about what he witnessed, as his sanity will be the first thing to be called into question and “we don’t need another Abu Ghraib”. In another sequence, McCoy, wearing a ski mask and altering his voice

to protect his identity, confesses in a YouTube video to what we viewers have witnessed, urging the people watching not to listen to the media and to understand the ‘true reality’ of the Iraq War experience. I will later discuss how this variety of media visuals contributes to *Redacted*’s status as an innovation in Hollywood representations of contemporary combat, as well as its relation to post-9/11 American culture. For the purposes of narrative structure, the use of different media for the internal perspective can be seen as a departure from De Palma’s New Hollywood performance-centered confessional, one which highlights technology as either a filter or barrier between civilians and the real events.

The *external perspective* serves to underscore the internal perspective, what we consider the principal narrative which we are simultaneously tracking. These external perspectives attempt to criticize that which the internal perspective may fail to critically examine as a result of direct involvement in the central action. The first external perspective we encounter is a French documentary film crew, filming the daily actions of characters encountered previously, a style that actually takes us to a comfortable distance away from them. These sequences question both the mission and the tactics, such as asking whether Iraqis, many of whom are illiterate, can understand the check-point signs. De Palma’s 2007 audience would already have been familiar with at least some of the crop of Iraq War documentaries, ranging from Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Lionsgate, 2004) to James Longley’s *Iraq in Fragments* (HBO Films, 2006), and may have identified documentary as a revitalized mode of social and political criticism (and in some cases activism). The documentary sequences, as well as Al Jazeera broadcasts, also provide exposition, explanatory notes not provided by the soldier narratives, and action relevant to the narrative but occurring beyond the knowledge of the soldier characters. The death of Salazar at the

hands of Al Qaeda terrorists is never seen by his fellow soldiers, but rather is presented through a news broadcast using the video recording made by Salazar's killers.

Most importantly, De Palma's use of the external perspective enables the spectator to assume the perspective of multiple random players outside the central story of the soldier characters. Here, De Palma is able to fully achieve what he was unable to do with *Casualties of War*. He enables us to inhabit the space of 'the other', rather than simply witness the actions against them. In a scene before Salazar's commanding officer, Sergeant Sweet (Ty Jones), is killed by an IED—a scene echoing the death of Brownie in *Casualties of War*—the audience becomes privy to the actual planting of the IED. A video streaming on a jihadist website shows an Iraqi child planting the IED, disguised as a football, under a ragged, discarded couch on an immense rubbish heap. A voice from behind the camera urges the child to hurry. Sequences such as this allow a three-dimensional space for the narrative to exist which never entails straying too far from the central story.

Characters as 'agents' and characters as 'patients': Traditional character closure  
displaced by media and combat chaos

De Palma's films feature characters whose destinies are shaped by a psychologically jolting experience—an act of violence or traumatic experience. His body of work is rife with examples: Carrie's menstrual period in a high school locker room shower (*Carrie*, 1976), Tony Montana being forced to watch his friend be dismembered by a chainsaw (*Scarface*, 1983), and Elliot Ness being moved by the tragic death of a young girl in a gang-related bombing (*The Untouchables*, 1987). The journey of both *Casualties of War* and *Redacted*'s characters are shaped by the death of a guiding

force in their lives—commanding officers Browning (*Casualties*) and Sweet (*Redacted*) are characters who are killed off early on in both films, leaving the surviving characters to craft their own destiny and morality. De Palma notes that the atrocities that stem from these jarring experiences rely on a “wild card”—a character that is “the one guy that’s a little crazier than anybody else and drives [the other soldiers] into doing [a] horrendous act” (IFC News, 2007). It is in the antagonists of both films, Meserve (*Casualties*) and Flake (*Redacted*), that we see this wild-card effect.

The protagonists in both films face moral dilemmas centered on revenge. In *Casualties of War*, the horrors of combat engulf the central characters, but the protagonist seeks to redeem a mythology of ‘just war’. The story of *Casualties*’ protagonist is one where justice and redemption are never achieved in an ideal form, but rather within a sphere of realism. *Redacted*’s characters, on the other hand, are dwarfed by the chaos of combat and a technologically-driven fog of war. Their behavior and role within the larger narrative is largely determined by their use of media technology to convey their experiences. The result is that we are not left with a clear indication that justice has been or will be served. The story of each of *Redacted*’s individual characters, when contrasted with the characters from *Casualties*, supports my argument that De Palma has rewritten his *Casualties* characters for *Redacted* in order to counter a focused media representation of the American soldier.

The characters of *Redacted* and *Casualties* also serve similar functions in support of a larger anti-war message. The character group of both films rejects the approach of the World War II combat film—a cohesive group of soldiers of multiple ethnicities and



social classes as a metaphor for a united America—and adopts the approach used in Vietnam films of the 1970s and 1980s. In *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, 1978), *Apocalypse Now* (United Artists, 1979), *Platoon*, and *Full Metal Jacket*, to name a few, the characters who compose these combat groups are bound together through fear, anger, and disillusionment. The psychological doubling of characters as a commentary on both the war and the American sociopolitical landscape is also employed by De Palma in both films just as his New Hollywood contemporaries employed it in their respective films. Kurtz can be viewed as Willard's doppelganger (*Apocalypse Now*), and the same is true for Nick Chevotarevich and Mike Vronsky (*The Deer Hunter*) or Eriksson and Meserve (*Casualties*) or McCoy and Flake (*Redacted*). This doubling in both *Casualties* and *Redacted* is used as a commentary on the duplicitous nature of the American character. The protagonist assumes a dual role of film character and the conscience of the audience, and, in doing so, seeks to redeem an American mythology marred by heinous crimes.



Fig. 2.1. The combat group of *Redacted* (Magnolia Pictures, 2007).

Fredric Jameson notes that the war story “turns on the interaction of various character types gathered at random” in order to provide the war story with a “utopian overtone in which characters live in a disalienated world” (Jameson, 2009, 1534–1535). The idea that character types are “gathered at random,” suggests the strength of American

war mythology – the idea that war forges a social unity that is so powerful that no amount of social and ethnic difference can suppress it. This is a general truism of the World War II combat film, but the New Hollywood war film auteurs, De Palma amongst them, have revised the ‘combat group’ to function as a subversive commentary on the ‘American condition’. The combat group of *Casualties* serves a polemical function similar to the soldiers of Oliver Stone and Stanley Kubrick’s war pictures, but are specifically impersonalized, Eriksson notwithstanding, in order to address a direct issue of war atrocity rather than the total, realized experience. Similarly, *Redacted*’s combat group does not fit the stereotypical image of what we consider boot camp veterans to be—the idealized masculine form found in World War II films, or even early post-9/11 films (such as *Black Hawk Down*), are absent. De Palma’s soldiers are fat, skinny, disorderly, undisciplined, literate, and ignorant. One may have a criminal record (Fig. 2.1). On these grounds, *Redacted*’s ‘group’ is more akin to the New Hollywood combat group, including that of *Casualties*, but their individual character traits and motivations are reflected in their choice of media technology to express themselves and their experiences. The function of the group in both films is to undermine our understanding of the combat group as a cohesive, and ultimately homogenous, embodiment of a mythologized American character and to sharpen the focus on the issue of war inducing a shared experience of moral decline.

In *Casualties of War*, Eriksson guides us through the fog of war by acting as the agent and witness of the narrative—functioning in a way similar to *Platoon*’s Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen) or *Apocalypse Now*’s Willard (Martin Sheen)—as if De Palma is giving us permission to experience the war through Eriksson. Eriksson’s story contains a clear character arc determined by the war environment and captured through standard New Hollywood aesthetics—the clash of slow motion with normal

speed, exposure to graphic, unsanitized violence, and the establishment of mood through a broad range of colour schemes—all of which provide the overall tone for Eriksson's testimony. The start of *Casualties*' second act establishes Eriksson's conflict over affirming what he perceives to be the true American war mythology—the stated intention of winning 'hearts and minds'. Eriksson's function in the second act is centered on an internal and external struggle to ensure that the 'intentions' are not subverted by primitive emotions. Eriksson succeeds on the internal level by refusing to succumb to blind rage and to excuse atrocity, but his failure to prevent this moral breakdown around him prompts his third-act mission: seeing justice served. The extent to which Eriksson achieves this third-act goal is ambiguous. The film's final scene, set in San Francisco's Deloris Park years after his military service, leaves the viewer with a sense of optimism that Vietnam's lessons may be learned by this new generation: Eriksson altruistically returns a lost scarf to a Vietnamese-American student (also played by Thuy Thu Le) in a moment which suggests closure and affirmation of the American mythology on Eriksson's own terms.

Meserve rationalizes the insanity of the war environment—and his crimes—by surrendering to the idea that empathizing with the occupied is a futile experiment. He disavows the traditional war mythology of the American soldier as symbol of high moral standards and commits rape and murder as acts of vengeance against what he sees as an alien population—a cohesive 'other' element—collectively responsible for the misery of the American soldier. Here, De Palma uses Meserve to embody two cultural perceptions pertaining to war and national identity: first, what Samuel Coale describes as a "sense of national identity...based on demonizing others" (Coale, 2005, 16), and secondly, war inducing an exaggerated form of masculinity. Meserve's character transformation begins with him filling the deceased Browning's

commanding role, a position for which Meserve lacks maturity—thus starting the film’s overall second act, a march towards atrocity. The journey he embarks on is an attempt to vindicate Browning’s view of the Vietnamese—trust no one—and to avenge his death; Meserve adopts wholesale Browning’s definition of a soldier’s nationalist identity and duty—one that clearly distinguishes him from people who “don’t want to be your friend”. De Palma presents this moment as the motivator of Meserve’s action, but it is violence and war trauma unleashing an unbridled, violently realized sense of masculinity which motivates Meserve towards selecting a specific atrocity—rape. This is reflected in Meserve’s dialogue and posturing: any questioning of the rationale or morality behind the crime about to be committed is met with homophobic slurs and the questioning of the soldier’s masculinity. By exhibiting this specific mentality, the character of Meserve acts as a double against Eriksson, a stark counter-narrative against Eriksson’s faith in the ‘just warrior’. The first and second acts of *Casualties* rest on the development of these characters as psychologically opposed doubles. The film’s third act leaves Meserve’s fate ambiguous—a ten-year sentence of hard labor, with some doubt as to whether or not it will be served. Yet, Meserve’s perversion of the American war mythology is invalidated by De Palma. It is through the story and eventual fate of Meserve that De Palma attempts to redeem an aspect of American mythology thought to have been lost in the wake of the Vietnam War.

“You know what I like about you, Salazar, besides absolutely nothing? Absolutely nothing and your sweet and sunny disposition.” – Lawyer McCoy

*Redacted*’s Angel Salazar (Izzy Diaz) mirrors *Casualties of War*’s Private Max Eriksson in the role of witness. We experience the degrading psychological

externalities of combat through their eyes, but it is both technology and our understanding of modern warfare which dictates the mode by which we witness through Salazar. He is identified as the Latino in De Palma's 'combat group', "my *essé*" as Sergeant Sweet calls him, but it is clear that Salazar's role within the narrative is not to demonstrate the dissolution of racial divides through shared combat experience. Salazar's digital video recordings in the first act are the primary internal perspective in the film (as discussed earlier), as they enable us to witness the combat experience beyond the context of both documentary and the twenty-four-hour cable news cycle (external perspectives which are both real and dramatized for the film); He invites the viewer into a 'real' world of soldiering life. Salazar is always documenting his experience—filming everything possible through his digital camera (footage which he constantly quality-checks) and through his hidden-camera ('mini-cam') planted on his helmet or uniform. Even when he is shown through the external perspective narration, looking bored and uninterested in his duties, he still documents what is occurring around him; during one external perspective narration (the French documentary *Barrage*), he stops to film a scorpion being devoured by ants in what we assume will be used as a metaphorical insert shot.<sup>2</sup> Whenever he films or is filmed, he strives for honesty, an impulse which informs his own feelings and attempts to elicit the same level of honesty and emotional depth from those whom he is filming, as if he was the director of the film we are watching. In one scene, he reads from John O'Hara's novel *Appointment in Samarra* (a title which catches his eye, as Samarra is where he is stationed) with an expressive and dramatic tone which he hopes will create a poetic undertone for the story he is attempting to tell (despite the fact that the novel has almost nothing to do with Samarra or Iraq in general).

Salazar's character departs from the character embodied by Eriksson in the second act. He is aware of the mental breakdown occurring within his unit in the wake of Sweet's death but does little to prevent the atrocity that follows. He only witnesses it and records the atrocity for us. Salazar is removed from the story—kidnapped and executed by Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)—at the start of the film's third act, so the viewer never sees him attempt to get to grips with his emotions at the scene of the atrocity which he witnesses, resulting in an 'unresolved dream'. The theme of the unresolved dream offers itself up as a substitute closure for Salazar's story. In a video of his psychological evaluation, Salazar confesses that he no longer watches his own videotapes after accidentally recording his superior officer being killed by an IED, leaving him haunted by nightmares and "hating everyone". Our lasting impression of Salazar is that, while not falling from grace as far as Reno Flake, he eventually gave in to the same mental breakdown which gripped the rest of his unit.

"If something happened, something really, really horrible, and you knew who was responsible, isn't it your duty to say something?" – Lawyer McCoy

In *Redacted*, De Palma also has McCoy (Rob Devaney) stand in for *Casualties of War*'s Eriksson, but McCoy serves the film's message differently. While Salazar echoes Eriksson's role of witness, McCoy serves as a latter day 'voice of conscience' on behalf of his squad and the mission. The difference is that McCoy is fully acclimated to his soldier role, college-educated, and able to iterate a coherent war rationale to his fellow soldiers ("You know why we are here. We are helping the new Iraqi government"). From his first appearance, in Salazar's 'documentary', McCoy postures himself as a moral leader of his squad, procedural and taking his role seriously. He clearly presents himself as a family man: he communicates with his

father through Skype and his wife through a video blog. He refuses to participate in Flake's plan and makes several subsequent attempts to see that justice is served. He, rather than Salazar, attempts to prevent the atrocity and see that justice is served. McCoy does not play as prominent a role in the internal perspective of the film's first act as Salazar does. This does not happen until the second act, when the focus shifts towards McCoy as a soldier attempting to be the moral center of his unit. Just like Eriksson, when he becomes aware of Meserve's intentions, McCoy attempts to stop Flake and his cadre from carrying out their premeditated crime. Once the horrendous crime is committed, McCoy's mission is to ensure that the soldiers responsible face justice. The means at his disposal, however, present even more difficulties than in Eriksson's case, a military structure which modern technology has made even more labyrinthine. The close of the third act does not contain the same level of satisfaction or sense of closure as Eriksson's story. In his final scene, at a reunion with his wife and friends in a bar back in the United States, McCoy admits that he "didn't do anything to stop it". The overall purpose of McCoy in *Redacted* is, perhaps, to cast De Palma's Iraq mirror reversal of his Vietnam film in a more nihilistic/pessimistic light, asking whether the hopes he had for humanity to alter its course after Vietnam are truly well-founded.

"Flake is your average grunt, completely in touch with his primal self." – Angel Salazar

Reno Flake (Patrick Carroll) is *Redacted*'s 'wild card', just as Meserve is in *Casualties of War*, and Flake even admits as much in a digital-video confessional after Salazar's death. He establishes himself in the first act of the film as the 'bad boy' of the unit, willing to bend his moral values to achieve what he perceives as the

imposed war aims—rejecting the concept of the war hero mythology in lockstep with Meserve. Flake’s moral ambiguity is put into play during this first act while he is on patrol with his squad. Here, Flake is described by his commanding officer, Sergeant Sweet, as the “cream of army recruiting”; Flake is a man who spent his pre-war days getting drunk and trying to stay out of jail. His unpredictable behavior is exhibited strongly in Patrick Carroll’s performance: when he is filmed, whether he is aware of it or not (and regardless of whether it is through the internal perspective or external perspective), he comes across as aloof and bored with his duties (twiddling live ammunition round in his hand while on duty at a military check-point). When he speaks, he staggers and slithers about—swaying from side to side with each word and movement. It is through these characteristics that he achieves the level of arrogance that Meserve embodies through his character.

A hyper-level of masculinity stemming from combat experience, again embodied in Meserve, is also present in Flake’s character. The rape and murder which he orchestrates stem from the same impulse which drove Meserve to lead his team down a similar path, but Flake’s justification of the crime is not as fully crafted as Meserve’s (this may be De Palma’s commentary on the justifications for the invasion of Iraq). Flake spends his recreational time in the barracks reading pornography and reminiscing on his lusting after women before he joined the military. After Sweet’s death, Flake asserts himself as the alpha male of the unit, echoing Meserve, a role for which he is morally ill suited. This dramatic beat turns one of the second act’s foci into a contest between Flake and McCoy for the leadership and moral superiority over the group. This sets up an expectation of a confrontation reminiscent of the confrontation between Eriksson and Meserve, but De Palma diminishes any sense of closure for Flake’s story in the film’s third act—no clear justice is achieved. We are



made aware that the charges brought against Flake and his team have been escalated to an interrogation by a panel of superior officers, but his fate is kept secret. Rather than learning his fate, the viewer is only treated to a YouTube video (“The Get Out of Iraq Campaign”) from a civilian expressing outrage at the event and asking for revenge to be taken on Flake. This decision from the writer/director casts this retelling of *Causalities* with a stronger degree of pessimism, perhaps as a commentary that the lessons of Vietnam are being repeated.

The new logistics of perception, or ‘digital fatigue’ in contemporary combat films

*What I can’t convey via this video journal is the incredible heat and the local smells.*  
– Angel Salazar, opening dialogue of *Redacted*

J. David Slocum notes that the representational mode of the war film evolves alongside the evolution of technology since “increasingly impersonal technologies and the distant gaze through which one sees images of destruction empty those very images of meaning” (Slocum, 2001, 16). This observation appears to update Paul Virilio’s view that there is a direct correlation between a ‘way of seeing’ in war and the development of cinematic vocabularies (Virilio, 1984, 29). With this idea in mind, we can begin to analyze De Palma’s stylistic departure from the earlier form in *Redacted*’s production. On the one hand, *Causalities of War* and *Redacted* are visually connected through an impulse towards conveying realism. In a *Washington Post* review of *Casualties of War*, Hal Hinson wrote that “when blood spills out, it is at body temperature, fresh from living, suffering people” (Hinson, 1989). De Palma and his New Hollywood colleagues developed their own standards for realistically portraying graphic violence, a standard feature of the New Hollywood films for which Arthur Penn’s *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch* (1969), and

Coppola's *Godfather* films set a tone. The aim was to show personal and unsanitized violence in ways which removed the audience from its 'comfort zone'. De Palma, while unrelenting in his approach to graphic violence in *Redacted*, abandoned his New Hollywood approach to violence in favor of something more suitable to the post-9/11 world. The statement often attributed to François Truffaut that "there could never be an anti-war film, as the violence in such a film would inevitably excite the viewer to the point of siding with one group over the other" appeared to be validated by such films as *Black Hawk Down*, *We Were Soldiers* (2002), and *Saving Private Ryan*, graphically violent war films rendering the New Hollywood anti-war motive increasingly archaic and irrelevant.<sup>3</sup>

In one of its opening scenes, Salazar sets the precedent for the visual style of *Redacted*: the film will not be a "Hollywood action flick, no smash cuts, no adrenaline pumping soundtrack, [and] no logical narrative to help make sense of it". This line not only establishes the representation register of *Redacted*, but also reminds the viewer that the film is a repudiation of the visuals of *Casualties of War*. In this sequence, Salazar is not only filming, but also being filmed himself by McCoy, establishing the fact that both characters are the subjects of a web of multi-layered stories; neither is the central hero of a single, logical narrative. De Palma places this narrative as the central focal point of the story, but he by no means treats it as the most vital portion of the overall narrative. Here De Palma is addressing a critical representational issue plaguing post-9/11 war films, regardless of their implied stance on the war, which is also a continuation of an older, post World War II theme: the mechanization of war (in this case the digitization of war) contributes to the impersonal and disconnected nature of modern combat. In *Redacted*, De Palma exhibits what Garret Stewart refers to as "digital fatigue", in that "storytelling is

among the casualties of...‘improvised’ devices....Gone are the choreographed and the panoramic....We get instead random checkpoint suicides...all of it saturated by video” (Stewart, 2009, 45). The intertwining of contemporary combat technology and cinematic strategies, what Virilio argues is the by-product of war and representation, has ultimately diminished notions of individual sacrifice and personal drama inherent to the traditional war film.

Digital fatigue is not the product of digital imaging in contemporary war cinema, as the use of digital images is part of much broader stylistic innovations in global cinema that emerged towards the end of the 1990s. Rather, digital fatigue is the product of a “political symptom” that underscores how this technology operates in both the war film and in actual warfare (47); the managing and strategizing of war through satellite imagery, live reconnaissance video feeds, and cell phones has placed a cold, impersonal distance from the death and destruction occurring at ground level. The result is that the use of digital technology, in both waging contemporary warfare and in representing it, overwhelms plot and narrative with the visuals, diminishing the drama that the spectator is accustomed to from earlier war films. In the case of *Redacted*, Stewart observes that the film relies so heavily on hand-held digital cameras, night-vision lenses, and surveillance equipment that “the only mission with any focus has become transmission itself” (51). Though drama and narrative may be overwhelmed by digital technology in *Redacted*, it is the use of this technology, as “docudrama,” that serves a particular anti-war aim of de Palma: a critique of past modes of visualizing war carnage in anti-war films.

De Palma's use of these various media modes to service his critique of the Iraq, the use of both the internal and external perspectives, supports Patricia Pisters' view that *Redacted* and other Iraq War films constitute a new logistics of perception, what she refers to as "Logistics of Perception 2.0." A coherent narrative is present in *Redacted*, one that is forwarded by multiple screens and acknowledges contemporary warfare's multi-mediated face, a literal "battle of the screens" (Pisters 2010, 241). De Palma's film acknowledges Jean Baudrillard's view of the relationship between war and media coverage, while at the same time asserting that multiple perspectives (and multiple screens) are necessary when depicting a brought to the American public by cable news networks.<sup>4</sup> *Redacted* fills Baudrillard's "empty images" with actual death and destruction occurring at ground level, in a way echoes the reasons his New Hollywood cohorts changed their approach to violence during the Vietnam War (241). The difference in the visual approaches to war violence in *Redacted* and *Casualties of War*, however, is part of the changes to the visual form in contemporary war films, indicative of a new logistics of perception.

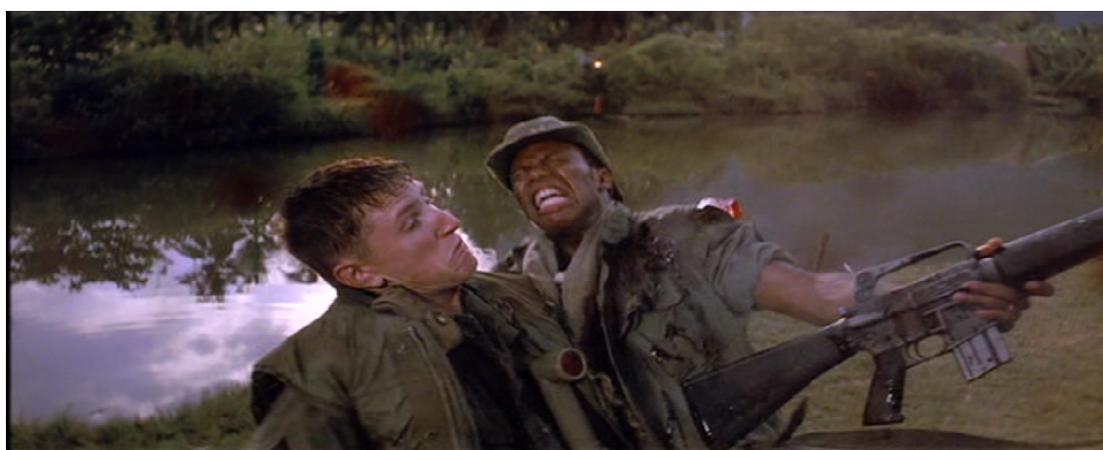


Fig. 2.2. The death of Corporal Browning in *Casualties of War* (Warner Brothers, 1989).



Fig. 2.3. The death of Sergeant Sweet in *Redacted* (Magnolia Pictures, 2007).

The deaths of *Casualties*' Browning (Fig. 2.2) and *Redacted*'s Sweet (Fig. 2.3) are related to each other. They both usher in each film's second act (the march to atrocity). Their stylistic differences, however, help to illustrate the logic behind De Palma's departure from earlier form. From the moment Browning's body is struck by a sniper's bullet, the camera, lens stained with his blood, never strays from him, operating in slow motion as he falls to the ground. De Palma forces the viewer to absorb every detail of the process of life slowly fading from such a 'casualty of war'. Editor Bill Pankow (*The Untouchables* and *Body Double*) does not cut away until after Browning has landed on the ground, screaming, at death's door. The visual construction of the scene borrows from war films of the previous two decades (an aesthetic tool made popular by New Hollywood icons Sam Peckinpah and Arthur Penn). A specific echo can be found in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (Fig. 2.4) with the death of "Cowboy". Kubrick sharpens the intensity of the moment, allowing the viewer to focus on every graphic moment of becoming a war casualty, achieving what Stephen Prince calls a "reaction against...movie traditions, misleading and grossly out of step with the times" (Prince, 2000, 176).



Fig. 2.4. The death of “Cowboy” in *Full Metal Jacket* (Warner Brothers, 1987).

If the aesthetic of slow-motion violence in *Full Metal Jacket* and *Casualties* can be seen as a “reaction against movie traditions”, so too can the absence of slow motion in *Redacted*. In the years after 9/11, death-in-slow-motion became a conventional film aesthetic which no longer achieved the end for which it was originally intended. As suggested by Salazar’s captured POV shot, Sweet’s death is witnessed at the speed at which it would be witnessed if the audience were actually in Salazar’s boots. Sweet’s death in slow motion would have been an illogical interruption to the chosen representational mode and would also have drawn attention to itself as a ‘Hollywood tool’, inciting mistrust from the viewer. In *Redacted*, De Palma assumes the role of an ‘invisible director’ in order to improve upon his approach to graphic violence as a tool for conveying an anti-war message, avoiding a distinct style which would call attention to itself, make his anti-war aims suspect, and suggest manipulation.

## The Internet Anti-War Movement

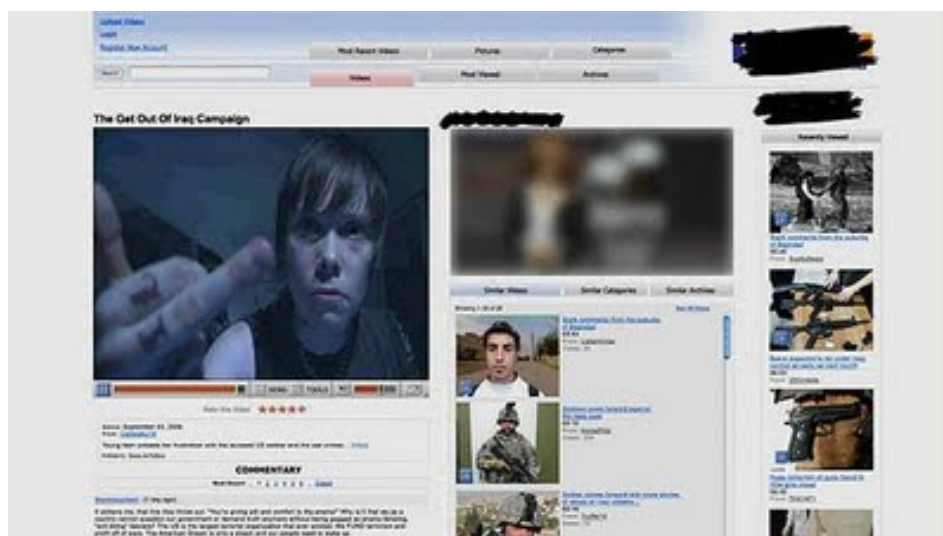


Fig. 2.5. “The Get Out of Iraq Campaign” YouTube blog commenting on the crimes of Reno Flake and his fellow soldiers in *Redacted* (Magnolia Pictures, 2007).

For Friedrich Kittler, the invasion by media and “serial photography” in war was intended to “bring about new bodies” (Kittler, 1999, 128). In contemporary war films, these ‘new bodies’ are brought to the attention of non-combatants via the digital technologies that shape our perception of modern combat, namely Internet videos. Web technology contributes to the visual score of *Redacted* on two levels: first, in simultaneous support of both the external perspective and the internal perspective and, second, in support of the film’s broader, anti-war message. The first level can be detailed without much difficulty. The YouTube videos and Skype chat dialogue further the overall narrative, either by enabling the central characters the space for private confession, or by enabling non-characters to provide a commentary on the general narrative (fig. 2.5). Web technology in support of an anti-war message identifies the role of an online culture of opposition since the outbreak of the Iraq War.



Fig. 2.6. “WikiLeaks Collateral Murder” video from YouTube.com.

On April 5, 2010, WikiLeaks.com released cockpit footage from an Apache helicopter of the shooting of Reuters journalists in Baghdad on July 12, 2007 (Fig. 2.6), footage previously suppressed by the State Department and dubbed on YouTube the “WikiLeak Iraq Collateral Murder video”. The incident, coupled with a concurrent bombing in Afghanistan which killed innocent civilians, sparked a massive string of YouTube responses from across the globe (Fig. 2.7). De Palma’s use of this visual medium is an attempt to highlight both the role the Internet plays in the anti-war movement and the fact that candid, principled opposition is absent from conspicuous forms of mass media (e.g., the twenty-four-hour cable news cycle).



### Collateral Murder in Iraq/ 5 innocent dead in Afghanistan US attempted Cover L

37 videos



Fig. 2.7. YouTube response to “WikiLeaks Collateral Murder” and the killing of innocent Afghan civilians on February, 2010.

De Palma also highlights the role of the Internet in the jihadist movement, videos used to shock and terrify the West and to highlight the exploits of jihadists in Iraq and elsewhere. The videotaped beheading of Angel Salazar at the hands of Al Qaeda (Fig. 2.8) is similar to videos of beheadings at the hands of AQI’s former leader Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi—notably the beheading of Nicholas Berg (Fig. 2.9). Not only have these videos been exploited by jihadists, but right-wing talk-show hosts and provocateurs (most notably Michael Savage) have also used these videos as a militaristic rallying cry, deliberately characterizing the enemy’s Otherness, drawing a clear and coherent ‘us’ and ‘them’ narrative. Through the similarities between the video of the beheading of Nicholas Berg and the video of Salazar’s death, De Palma illustrates that the Internet videos from Iraq are not merely a tool of the American, anti-war left, nor are these videos mere documentaries used to enlighten American civilians in the comfort of their own homes.



Fig. 2.8. The beheading of Angel Salazar in *Redacted* (Magnolia Pictures, 2007).



Fig. 2.9. The beheading of Nicholas Berg at the hands of AQI's Zarqawi.

### *Redacted*: A 'counter-narrative' rather than 'combat realism'

Kevin Provencher's *Film Quarterly* review of *Redacted* opens with a suggestion that a possible reaction to the film would question its authenticity, and "*Redacted*, in many ways, conditions that reaction" (Provencher, 2008, 32). Provencher is perhaps correct on the grounds that De Palma's film may invite such scrutiny, but De Palma's aim with this film is to invite dialogue and debate rather than to convey authenticity. De Palma was by no means striving for authenticity above all else with *Casualties of War*, but was rather attempting, as he subsequently did with *Redacted*, to answer a specific question regarding the process of moral breakdown and atrocity. Both films, despite their respective differences in stylistic approach to the subject matter, utilize some of the common elements contained in previous war films. Both films contain

violence—specifically, rape—as a “ritual of initiation or purification” (Gronstad, 2008, 52). War as an affirmation of masculinity is another key component of De Palma’s war films, and this is something that can be specifically observed by contrasting each of the characters analyzed above (specifically Flake and Meserve).

One of the principle arguments, however, against authenticity and combat realism as the primary goal in De Palma’s work, in my view, is based on how De Palma confronts both war and the war film. *Redacted* acknowledges the continued presence of the ‘cleansed image’ in news media coverage of the Iraq war, what Baudrillard describes as “war enclosed in a glass coffin...purged of any carnal contamination or warrior’s passion” (Baudrillard, 2001, 65). In other words, Vietnam War films dramatized what audiences had witnessed on the nightly news coverage during the war, but Iraq War films, in order to deliver any meaningful anti-war message, are forced to dramatize these events in a unique visual register to de-dramatize them; American news coverage of warfare since the Gulf War has sanitized the presentation of warfare, and films such as *Redacted* and Iraq War documentaries are offering a counter-representation via their framing of conflict, depiction of bloodshed, and abandonment of, according to Angel Salazar, “logical narration to make sense of it all”.

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Examples of right-wing outrage over *Redacted* is highlighted in “De Palma Iraq Flick Bombs” from *The New York Post* and Michael Medved’s review of the film.

([http://www.nypost.com/p/pagesix/item\\_0ORELzpM3osTYX15O5ubnM.jsessionid=FC7CE37C44954AAAA54BAD342BAE4C29](http://www.nypost.com/p/pagesix/item_0ORELzpM3osTYX15O5ubnM.jsessionid=FC7CE37C44954AAAA54BAD342BAE4C29))

<sup>2</sup> This shot can be read as an allusion to Sam Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch* (Warner Brothers, 1969), a Western that has been seen as an allegory for America’s involvement in Vietnam, and which contains a similar shot of a scorpion devoured by ants.

<sup>3</sup> It is unclear where the quote attributed to Truffaut originally appeared, but this view has been echoed by film critics in discussions of both war films and non-war films (see Roger Ebert’s review of Mario Van Peeble’s *New Jack City* (Warner Brothers, 1991), for example). Post-Vietnam anti-war films can be read as an attempt to contest Truffaut’s view, and *Casualties of War* and *Redacted* appear to be such films.

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<sup>4</sup> During the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991), Jean Baudrillard published a series of articles concerning the war, in which he argued that the war may as well have not happened; the real war was never presented to Western audience, and what was seen instead was a clean war with no casualties, produced by CNN.

### Chapter Three

#### **Bringing Fallujah home: War reshaping the homeland in post-9/11 cinema**



Fig. 3.1. U.S. Marine/Norteños gang member Andres Raya preparing a military-style ambush of police officers in Ceres, California, January 9, 2005 (after returning from a tour of duty in Iraq).

In early 2007, the FBI released a report entitled “Gang Activity in the U.S. Armed Forces Increases”, stating that “members of nearly every major street gang...and various white supremacist groups, have been documented on military installations both domestically and internationally” and “receive weapons, combat, and convoy support training...[and] upon discharge, may employ their military training against law enforcement officials and rival gang members”.<sup>1</sup> This report was released two years after a shooting incident in front of a convenience store in Ceres, California. Andres Raya, a nineteen-year-old U.S. marine and Norteños gang member, armed with an SKS rifle and utilizing military tactics learned through his Iraq experience, ambushed two police officers responding to a 911 call that Raya himself had placed (Fig. 3.1).<sup>2</sup> In that moment, American urban warfare was refashioned into the urban warfare of Iraq, with deadly consequences. This incident is an extreme, real-life example of a particular war-film topic: war as a force that alters the domestic social order.



Fig. 3.2. Homer Parish (Harold Russell) and Wilma Cameron (Cathy O'Donnell) in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (RKO, 1946).

Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner argue that the self-identity of the returning veteran, a significant motif in Vietnam representation, is partly constructed as an internalization of the nation as a military power, and that the loss of a sense of self worth exhibited by many returning Vietnam veterans was linked to the nation's military failure (Ryan, 2006, 240). In war films, the returning veteran acts as a vehicle for representing the war's alteration of the American social landscape. Although war-altered American landscapes feature in American cinema as early as D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (RKO, 1946) can be read as a direct forerunner to the Vietnam War veteran films (Fig. 3.2).<sup>3</sup> The themes contained in Wyler's film—the alienation of veterans and their attempts to readjust to civilian life—figure largely in the Vietnam veteran films of New Hollywood, namely Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, 1978) and Hal Ashby's *Coming Home* (United Artists, 1978), and in later films, such as Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* (Universal Pictures, 1989). Mike Vronsky from *The Deer Hunter*, Luke Martin from *Coming Home*, and Ron Kovic from *Born on the Fourth of July* each exhibit the loss of self-worth that Ryan

and Kellner describe, and attempt to forge new identities in opposition to the dominant war mythologies in support of the Vietnam War. The returning Vietnam veteran was the dominant variant of this motif until the emergence of Iraq and Afghanistan War veteran films—Paul Haggis’s *In the Valley of Elah* (Warner Independent, 2007) being an early example—in which the war-veteran film would be rewritten to address living history.

There are two primary questions that can address how the Vietnam veteran films and the post-9/11 veteran films differ and connect: a) how do the visuals present a war-altered social order, and b) how is the memory of war conveyed through traumatized characters? These are important questions to consider, as the characters and visual construction of these films appear to be their primary means of portraying an altered American landscape. The characters exhibit changes in perception, and the ways that their homeland is presented visually helps to underscore this change in perception.

Genre memory provides a good methodology for answering the first question. Both the Vietnam veteran film and the post-9/11 veteran film invert Paul Virilio’s observation—that “there is no war, then, without representation, no sophisticated weaponry without psychological mystification” (Virilio, 1989, 6)—extending the psychological issues of perception in warfare from the battlefield to the home front. Post-9/11 veteran films, however, retain some formal approaches from older veteran films but incorporate more advanced narrative and visual techniques. In the post-9/11 veteran film, the new logistics of perception, discussed in the previous chapter, are transferred from the combat zone to the home front: digital videos supplement the memories of traumatized Iraq veterans in Kimberly Peirce’s *Stop Loss* (Paramount Pictures, 2008), the memory of the death of veteran Sam Cahill’s (Tobey Maguire)

friend at the hands of the Taliban is encapsulated on a digital video camera in Jim Sheridan's *Brothers* (Lionsgate, 2009), and a cell-phone video from a missing Iraq War veteran may help to solve a murder in Paul Haggis' *In the Valley of Elah*. By extending the formal aspects of the new combat films to the homeland—digital recording media and surveillance technology informing the editing and cinematography—these films are able to convey an altered social landscape without the physical modification of the landscape in the production design.

Examining the characters of these films, alongside historical context, is key to exploring how the veteran film addresses the memory of war. The new veteran films are concerned with living history, addressing the effects of wars which are (at the time of their release) still in progress, a sharp contrast to the Vietnam War films. These films also acknowledge the larger social concerns that stem from war's impact on the home front: suicide rates amongst veterans, post traumatic stress disorder, and combat training informing violent crime (evidenced by Andres Raya and reflected in Haggis' film). Martin Barker takes this observation a step further and argues that in the new veteran films "the whole of America is sick with on-going PTSD", passing from the traumatized soldier to other civilians like a virus (Barker, 2011, 98). The veteran characters in *The Deer Hunter*, *In the Valley of Elah*, and other veteran films, convey their war trauma through silence, allowing their actions and mannerisms, coupled with the formal elements, to speak a deeper truth than can be conveyed through words.

In this chapter, I will analyze *The Deer Hunter* alongside *In the Valley of Elah* to reveal how contemporary veteran films encode war's effect on the American social



landscape. This chapter will compare the cinematography and editing of *The Deer Hunter* with that of *In the Valley of Elah*, and, in doing so, will demonstrate how the new veteran film injects the new logistics of perception into a visual style developed by earlier veteran films. I will also contrast the characters of Mike Vronsky, Nikanor “Nick” Chevotarevich, and Steven Pushkov from *The Deer Hunter* with the characters of Hank Deerfield and (the mostly unseen) Mike Deerfield of *In the Valley of Elah* in order to illustrate how the memory of war is addressed in contemporary veteran films.

#### Post-war America as ‘Romanticism’: Michael Cimino’s *The Deer Hunter*

According to John Hellmann, *The Deer Hunter* analyses the Vietnam War’s transformation of American society by inverting the mythology of the Western genre. Western genre formulas “afford Cimino the strengths of the central national myth in dealing with Vietnam as a collective American trauma...[but] achieves more than a perpetuation of a past myth by its understanding of the essence of the myth and its critical examination of it” (Hellmann, 1982, 420). Cimino achieves this critical examination of American mythology by presenting Vietnam as a “historic projection of an internal struggle...one where the [Western] dream of mastery over nature...is turned upside down into a nightmare of captivity” (Hellman, 1986, 175). For the central characters of *The Deer Hunter*, Mike (Robert De Niro), Nick (Christopher Walken), and Steven (John Savage), this captivity is both a literal event and a metaphor for their post-war psyche. After their escape from a Vietnamese prison in the film’s second act, these characters spend the third act unable to connect with their pre-war selves because they are still, at least mentally, imprisoned. It is through their silence, coupled with a visual presentation of an altered American landscape, that *The*

*Deer Hunter*'s traumatized veterans place themselves outside of the mythologies of an American past. The Western myth of the white man triumphing over nature and taming the uncivilized is clearly endorsed by the non-veteran characters of John, Axel, and Stanley. For the veteran characters Mike, Nike, and Steve, however, this mythology becomes empty after their war experience, rendered unbelievable by their war trauma.

In my analysis of *The Deer Hunter*, I will first discuss how the film's visual language contributes to Cimino's presentation of a war-altered American homeland. Cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond's use of wide shots and zoom lenses, his staging of American and Vietnamese landscapes, and a repetition of locations, in conjunction with Peter Zinner's editing—repeated shots, long takes, and jump cuts—underscore the war trauma experienced by the veteran, a trauma that renders unfamiliar a once familiar American landscape. The second part of my analysis concerns the veteran characters themselves, how they transcribe their Vietnam experience through their actions and through silence. This is achieved through Cimino's use of silent witnesses, aesthetic personifications of how trauma theory operates in the war film; the traumatized soldiers, in this case the veterans of *The Deer Hunter*, take a self-preserving distance from the traumatic event while at the same time acting as agents of war trauma in narrative form.<sup>4</sup> The veteran characters convey the story's themes to the spectator not through dialogue but through silence. Lastly, I will show how Cimino uses the historical context surrounding the film's release to further punctuate the film's themes. *The Deer Hunter* is told in three acts (pre-war, war, and post-war), and throughout my analysis, I will be referring to the differences between these acts to illustrate the film's formal and narrative approaches.

A critical component of the film's visual approach can be found in Zsigmond's cinematography and Zinner's editing, a formal language that enables physical landscapes to underscore the mental state of the characters. Cimino does not allow conspicuous film techniques to overwhelm the narrative or draw attention away from the performances. There are no elaborate camera movements or inventive angles, and the editing style and pacing does not call attention to itself. The town of Clairton, Pennsylvania, the film's primary setting, and the majestic Allegheny Mountains, the deer hunting ground of the central characters, are framed and presented differently at various points in the film in order to reflect the altered mental state of the veteran characters, even though these locations are not physically altered through the production design.

"*The Deer Hunter* is probably one of my realistic pictures", Zsigmond stated in an interview for the book *Masters of Light*. "I wanted everything to look very real. When you think of a steel mill town, it's smoky, hazy with bluish tones outside. Inside the mill, you have these warm tones of the furnaces and the lighting in contrast to the outside. The Vietnam footage was very sharp and had a newsreel quality to it. Up in the mountains I wanted to create the feeling of freedom and freshness. There was no flashing or diffusion there. I wanted it very clear and crisp" (Schaefer, 1984, 336). The visual style that Zsigmond describes here is used in a way that stands in contrast to many other films of the era, evidenced by the conspicuous camera movements found in the work of Martin Scorsese. In all three of the film's acts, the camera mobility rarely calls attention to itself, allowing subjects to enter and leave the frame with little tracking. This is aided by the use of wide shots and zoom lens (Fig. 3.3).<sup>5</sup>

The wedding scene in act one, the film's two hunting sequences (act one and act three), and the establishing shot of a Vietnamese village at the start of act two exemplify Zsigmond's visual approach. Wide shots and zooms are used in each of these scenes, making the characters dominate the frame or creating the appearance of a clash between man and nature—a perennial Western motif that can be found in the work of Anthony Mann or John Ford. The result is a perception that the American landscape has changed, whereas it is only the characters inhabiting this space who have changed.



Fig. 3.3. A wide shot from the second hunting scene, in the film's third act, framed through a zoom lens. *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, 1978)

In *The Deer Hunter*, the landscape is presented in a way that calls attention to the psychological damage exhibited by the veterans. The hunting sequences in the film are vital to Cimino's commentary on the war's effect on the American homeland, not only because the locations and characters are repeated, but also because they contribute to a character role reversal, aided by Zsigmond's manner of using nature in his shots. Consider the last hunting scene in the film, in which Mike, with a clear shot of his quarry, chooses to let the deer live, shouting "OK?" as the deer flees into the mountains. Mike's altered state puts him in a position where he identifies with the

prey, having previously been the prey in Vietnam. It is as if, according to Cimino, the bullet that struck him in Vietnam has remained in his body.<sup>6</sup> This is evoked in two ways: through shot composition establishing a dual hunter and prey perspective throughout the film, and through the echoes of the generically characteristic visual tropes during the hunting scenes.



Fig. 3.4. Our view of the Clairton Orthodox church from across the street in the film's first act (top), a North Vietnamese soldier viewed from the jungle by an unknown spectator in the second act (middle), and a view of Clairton from Mike's home during the third act (bottom) (Universal Pictures, 1978).

Cimino establishes this reading at an early point in the film through Zsigmond's cinematography. There are several shots in the film that are taken from behind trees and foliage, in some cases partially obstructing our view of the characters. Most of these shots form part of scenes which do not involve hunting—on the street across from the church, as the wedding is about to take place, for example (fig. 3.4) – and the camera assumes the role of predator and prey. In framing his shots in this manner,

Cimino and Zsigmond foreshadow the change to Mike's mental state, one that will play out during the final hunting scene. Mike began the film as a hunter, a deer slayer recognized by the audience as a staple of the Western. In Vietnam, Mike became the hunted, and this role reversal remains a part of his psyche in to the third act, an inversion of a Western myth.



Fig. 3.5. Echoes of the combat film: the hunters pursue their prey in the final hunting scene of *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, 1978).

During the final hunting scene, there is a shot of the hunters firing at and chasing a deer. This shot is framed in a way that suggests the visuals from a World War II combat film (Fig. 3.5). The character of Axel runs alongside his fellow hunter's line of fire in a way that recalls soldiers from previous wars storming beaches or running off into a World War I 'no-man's-land'. The hunters whose performances mimic combat action are characters who did not serve in Vietnam with Mike. At the start of the first hunting sequence in the film's first act, the soon-to-be veteran characters are singing the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne song as their vehicle ascends into the mountains, so the shift in Mike's mental state in the second hunt is clearly planted in the first one. Axel's motions during the second hunt, when contrasted to those of Mike, suggest, through visual metaphor, their inability to grasp Mike's post-war mental state. Mike, by



contrast, is a solitary hunter – isolated both physically against the majestic landscape and mentally by his memories of Vietnam. By staging a second (post-war) deer hunt in the same locale with most of the same characters, the audience is able to experience the alteration to the American social space without any physical changes to the landscape; Vietnam never physically touched American soil, as is true with all wars of the twentieth century, but, through the altered state of its veterans, we feel the change nevertheless.



Fig. 3.6. St. Theodosius Russian Orthodox Cathedral, pre-war chapter, in *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, 1978).



Fig. 3.7. St. Theodosius Russian Orthodox Cathedral, post-war chapter, in *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, 1978).

The repetition of locations in *The Deer Hunter* plays an important role in underscoring the war trauma visited upon the American social order. This is evident

when one compares the framing of the same locations in both act one and act three. Act one's frames are filled with life and energy, whereas Zsigmond composes his act three shots to feel empty and distant, despite using the same locations and depicting the same characters.<sup>7</sup> Zsigmond additionally uses wide shots, both as establishing shots to cover continuous action, in order to allow the characters to dominate the locations. Consider the shots of Clairton, Pennsylvania's Russian Orthodox Church in both act one (Fig. 3.6) and act three (Fig. 3.7). Whilst both images are wide shots, the pre-war image is lively and naturally lit and depicts a prelude to a joyous event (an Orthodox wedding), whereas the post-war image is vacant—the town's inhabitants are attending a funeral—but maintains the same natural lighting approach. Both shots open with the domes of the cathedral and then pan down to street level, one shot with the intention of capturing life and the other with the intention of depicting emptiness. What is achieved through this approach, as illustrated by this shot pairing, is that the film's post-war chapter relies on repeating familiar images which, although not physically altered, are psychologically altered by character movement and staging—mimicking the state of mind of the film's veterans. We see this through the repetition of shots of Clairton, the character's homes, Johnny Welsh's bar (a location made very familiar in act one), and, most importantly, a second deer hunt scene set in the same mountain range.

Peter Zinner's editing in the film figures in how the post-war landscape is represented psychologically to complement Zsigmond's physical representation—in particular, the use of both jump cuts and long takes. On the one hand, Zinner uses long takes to allow the actor's performance to determine the direction and momentum of a sequence. Jump cuts, on the other hand, are used to interrupt these performance-



dominated sequences, either to heighten emotional intensity or to create a sense of unease. For example, this approach is utilized well during the wedding reception at the Lemko Hall venue. Long shots show the principal characters, days away from departing for Vietnam, drunkenly dancing and barely attempting to live up to the pride which their community has invested in them—as if going to war is another friendship ritual like the wedding reception or their hunting trips. The sequence is soon interrupted by jump cuts as the intensity of the dancing heightens, drawing the viewer into the characters' excited yet detached mental state. Most importantly, the war chapter itself is introduced as a jump cut, quickly moving the viewer from a quiet moment amongst friends in Johnny Welsh's bar to a rural Vietnamese village under attack from the North Vietnamese Army. The establishing shot of Vietnam is one in which Zsigmond uses the landscape as a character, both invoking the sublime and creating a jarring moment in which the viewer is removed from a comfortable location without warning. Thus, the editing plays a minimal role in support of the overall narrative and allows for the post-war trauma to be communicated predominately by the character's expressions and motions.

I would now like to turn to the film's veteran characters and the role that their silence plays in the film's exploration of Vietnam's impact on the American homeland. A key scene in *The Deer Hunter*'s first act, one which foreshadows the war's impact on the soon-to-be veteran characters, occurs during Steve's wedding. Announced by a quick shot amidst a series of long takes, an Army Green Beret (Paul D'Amato) wanders into the wedding hall, completely ignoring the elaborate dancing and merry-making, and takes a seat at the bar next to Steven, Mike, and Nick. Interested in hearing about the Vietnam War, the drunken friends enthusiastically inform the Green Beret, "We're going airborne soon", and ask him, "What's it like over there?" "Fuck it" is the

Beret's only response and only line of dialogue in the film (Fig. 3.8). This scene informs the transformation that Steven, Mike, and Nick will ultimately undergo through the war and post-war chapters, as each character becomes, in some form, this Green Beret character. The Green Beret character is the first appearance the silent witness, a character who knows the overarching theme of the film but refuses to express it directly. When the soldier characters survive the events of act two and move into act three, it is clear that the role of silent witness, first embodied by the Green Beret, is transferred to each of these three protagonists.



Fig. 3.8. Steve, Mike, the Army Green Beret, and Nick in *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, 1978).



Fig. 3.9. "Are you Nikanor Chevotarevich?" in *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, 1978)



Fig. 3.10. Michael Vronsky, avoiding his homecoming party in *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, 1978).



Fig. 3.11. A toast to Nick and Steve from Stanley, John, Axel, and Mike in *The Deer Hunter* (Universal Pictures, 1978).

Mike maintains the role of the alpha male leader of his circle of friends in all three of the film's acts, but the dynamics of this relationship are dramatically altered in the third act, as Mike assumes a mirror reversal role of the Green Beret character. The pre-war chapter is presented as a series of male rituals that are revisited in the post-war chapter to intentionally demonstrate the physical and psychological ramifications of a landscape altered by war. Upon his return from Vietnam, Mike refuses to engage with any aspect of his former life, mimicking the stoic silence of the Green Beret in

the bar sequence (Fig. 3.10). Late at night upon his return, he removes his uniform—shedding the physical semblance of a war veteran—but huddles against the wall, unable to climb into his own bed, as if he has never mentally left Vietnam. He finally breaks his silent, anti-social distance when he visits the home of the woman he secretly loves, Linda (Meryl Streep), her house symbolically painted red, white, and blue. In a subsequent scene, he reunites with friends Stanley (John Cazale), John (George Dzundza), and Axel (Chuck Aspergen) for a toast scene that mirrors the Green Beret scene from the wedding (Fig. 3.11). The common factor throughout these scenes is that Mike never speaks of his war experience. Instead, he relies on subtle glances and silence to suggest that the war is something that cannot be spoken of because to do so would de-sanctify the experience. Mike, as a silent witness war commentator, conveys an altered psyche without betraying the memory of his experience.

Nick, as a silent witness, is a psychological double to Mike. Mike leaves the war environment physically but is unable to do so mentally. Nick, on the other hand, neither physically nor mentally leaves the war environment. When questioned in an army hospital after his escape from enemy captivity (Fig. 3.9), Nick is unable to disclose to his interviewer his experiences or even his identity. As with Mike, the audience, in this scene, is able to witness the effects of war trauma directly through someone refusing to speak of it, rather than through a ‘staged’ character willing to communicate his emotions in great detail. Nick remains in Vietnam to live a shady existence playing Russian roulette, a deadly game introduced to him during his captivity as a prisoner of war (P.O.W.), in Saigon’s underground vice scene. The Russian roulette sequences in the film have been analyzed as a metaphor for America’s involvement in Vietnam, dramatizing the idea that lives were being

gambled with. It is as if the P.O.W. sequence where Nick, Steve, and Mike are forced by their Vietnamese captors to play Russian roulette against each other is a scene which may not have actually happened (occurring only in their minds) but which still sums up their entire war experience. With this metaphor in mind, we can see Nick performing his role as the silent witness by becoming addicted to risking his life in the same way he did as a P.O.W.; the metaphor of the Russian roulette game continues in a way that suggests that the war, psychologically, will never end for Nick.<sup>8</sup>

Steve acts as a silent witness through his post-war state as an amputee. After the war, Mike discovers that Steve never returned home. Rather, the paraplegic Steve chooses to live in a veteran's hospital in a wheelchair. He fulfills the role of silent witness through never discussing the war with Mike, only speaking fondly of the care-home he has relocated to ("I'm going to stay here, Mike. This place is great...basketball....Princess Grace..."). Where Cimino uses Steve's post-war state most effectively is in the scene just before Mike visits him: Mike visits Steve's wife, Angela (Rutanya Alda), who, speechless with grief, is unable to speak a word (crying and constantly trembling). In this scene, the home landscape, in this case, the family unit, is visibly altered by the war experience. The role of the silent witness is passed on to another—one who did not participate in the war—as if war trauma is a virus passed on to others (Barker, 2011, 98). The affect of war trauma, manifested in different characters but exhibited in similar ways, is presented to the viewer through silence—embodying the silence of many Americans, and Hollywood cinema, in response to the war and its impact on the American social landscape.



Fig. 3.12. The Vietnam that was and the Vietnam that never was: the fall of Saigon in *The Deer Hunter*'s third act (above) and the Russian Roulette scene from the film's second act (below) (Universal Pictures, 1978)

Lastly, I would like to discuss how historical context frames the presentation of a war altered social space in *The Deer Hunter*. The scene that is central to the both *The Deer Hunter* and my argument is the famous Russian roulette sequence, in which Nick, Mike, and Steve are forced by their Vietnamese captors to risk their lives (Fig. 3.12, bottom). Robert Eberwein points out that no historical evidence exists that the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong ever did this to their prisoners, an observation that contributes to the notion of the Russian roulette sequences in the film serving as a metaphor for America's involvement in Vietnam (Eberwein, 2010, 51). This "dominant metaphor" of the film, according to H. Bruce Franklin, can be seen as a "role reversal" of Eddie Adams's famous "Saigon Execution" photograph (an iconic image whose significance I will discuss further in chapter four) (Franklin, 1994, 57). The fact that Michael Cimino never shows his three soldier characters captured, cutting from a Vietnamese village under attack to wooden stockade partially submerged underwater, contributes to this reading of these sequences. If we combine

historical fact with Cimino's approach to this scene, we can entertain the idea that this sequence never actually happened within the world of the film. Rather, the first Russian roulette sequence is a metaphorical projection of the memory of war, and, as such, the whole Vietnam chapter of the film never actually happened to the characters as it was depicted. The fact that we never see the three soldier characters engaged in any combat, with the exception of Mike killing a North Vietnamese soldier with a flame thrower in the opening scene of the Vietnam chapter, also contributes to this reading of the Vietnam chapter of the film. Cimino's film, I argue, is focused completely on the effect of the Vietnam War on Middle America. Cimino does not actually take the viewer to the Vietnam War that was documented by journalists and historians. The exception is when Mike returns to Vietnam to find Nick, leading to the final Russian roulette scene, a sequence that coincides with the fall of Saigon in April of 1975 (Fig. 3.12, above). Cimino treats the viewers to shots of the Vietnamese and Americans attempting to flee the city, images that would have been familiar to audiences from televised reports three years before the film's release. The actual war experience shared by Mike, Steve, and Nick, however, exists only in their minds, to be played out in the film's third act.

That the film's title brings to mind the novels of James Fennimore Cooper suggests that America in the wake of the Vietnam War was attempting to forge a new frontier for itself and find a new national identity in the face of national failure. Cimino's objective with *The Deer Hunter* was to use a segment of Middle America to dramatically portray the cultural memory of Vietnam that existed during the late 1970s. The film's dialogue with previous American myths, as I pointed out earlier, is essential to its dramatization of American cultural memory of Vietnam. Terry Fox, in



his review for *Film Comment*, notes that the film's story is essentially implausible "except within the realm of myth" (Fox, 1979, 24). The question of whether Cimino succeeded in this objective has become a point of contention for film critics and scholars. The dividing line for many appears to be whether the film is anti-war or pro-war or whether making that distinction is beside the point.

On the one hand, one can make the case that the effectiveness of the approach is based on the fact that the film contains no overt politics, as to do so would create a barrier between the story and the audience. In his review of the film, Roger Ebert wrote that "*The Deer Hunter* is said to be about many subjects: about male bonding, about mindless patriotism, about Nixon's 'silent majority.' It's about any of those things you chose, if you chose....What *The Deer Hunter* insists is that we do not forget the war" (Ebert, 1979). On the other hand, one could argue that the film's failure to take an affirmative anti-war stance undermines its portrait of the war's lasting effects on the American landscape and culture. Jonathan Rosenbaum's review of the film (incidentally, published the same month as Ebert's: March of 1979) observes that the film "asks you to suspend whatever previous intelligence you have in exchange for a good cry about what nasty old Vietnam has done to a poor beleaguered America" (Rosenbaum, 1979). In other words, the film's failure to condemn America's involvement in the Vietnam War calls into question whether or not Cimino is being accurate or naive in his treatment of the alteration of the American landscape.

*The Deer Hunter* challenges a popular notion held by many in the military and Washing establishment towards the end of the Vietnam War: the war had been lost due to the military having had their hands tied behind their back by journalists and



politicians at home, otherwise known as the “stab-in-the-back mythology” (Suid 2002, 315). Rather, *The Deer Hunter* paints a portrait of a post-war American haunted by the memories of Vietnam, despite the fact that, according to Cimino, the war portrayed in the film could have been any war (356). In retrospect, the film is remembered today as an almost literary portrayal of manhood, brotherhood, and rite of passage. In this regard Cimino’s film has been hailed as a masterpiece. *The Deer Hunter*, however, fails to stand out within the canon of Vietnam War films as a provocative treatise on the war and U.S. foreign policy, as Oliver Stone’s films or even *Coming Home*, also released in 1978, do. Paul Haggis’s *In the Valley of Elah*, itself a reinterpretation of *The Deer Hunter* story through a post-9/11 lens, suggests an agreement with Rosenbaum’s assessment. Haggis takes the topic a step further by presenting a scarred American culture, arguing that the lessons of the Vietnam generation have not been learned.

#### Confronting *The Deer Hunter*: Paul Haggis’s *In the Valley of Elah*

In an interview for *Creative Screenwriting*, Paul Haggis, when asked about what had inspired him to make *In the Valley of Elah*, stated that the idea of an Iraq War film came to him in 2003 after the war was launched. Haggis, frustrated with the way the cable news networks reported on the conflict, turned to online video diaries posted by soldiers serving in Iraq. One video struck a terrifying chord, one made by an eighteen-year-old and edited to a rock anthem. In the video, the young soldier and his friends pose in front of the charred corpse of a dead Iraqi. The soldier lifts up the severed hand and waves it at the camera. Haggis’s response: “My God, what’s happening? Because I know these to be good men and women...they go for all the right reasons most of them...it’s late 2003 and this is happening already” (Haggis, 2008). This

response, I argue, informs the sense of social urgency contained in *In the Valley of Elah* and films like Brian De Palma's *Redacted*, an urgency reinforced by a recognition of the delayed response of the Vietnam War films, which, by the time they were released, addressed not living history but memory. Haggis's viewing of these Internet videos also presents an interesting insight into the role of the new logistics of perception ('digital fatigue') in shaping contemporary war cinema. That digital videos appear in Haggis's film is also a testimony to the influence of mass digital media on both war films and war reportage.

*In the Valley of Elah* provides a reworking of the David and Goliath story, in which those who believed themselves to be David discover that they are in fact Goliath. Haggis operated under different circumstances than Cimino, using living history, a war still in progress, to shape the direction of this retelling. The film acts as a post-9/11 response to Cimino's film as it utilizes some of *The Deer Hunter*'s visual tools and narrative devices. For one, the silent witness as the war commentator is embodied in two of the film's characters: Hank Deerfield (Tommy Lee Jones), a Vietnam veteran, and Hank's son Mike Deerfield (Jonathan Tucker), a soldier on leave from Iraq during the weeks leading up to the 2004 Presidential election, who has been reported as missing. A third of the way into the film, Mike's charred corpse is found, turning the film into a murder mystery and Mike into an apparition from the war. A parallel between Hank and Mike Vronsky exists throughout Haggis's film: Hank's silence and indirect action contributes to his role as a silent war-commentator in the same way as Vronsky in *The Deer Hunter*. Deerfield differs from Vronsky, however, on the grounds that he reveals an experience of both wars; Hank Deerfield acts as a bridge between two American historical eras in order to comment on the differences and relationships between the two.

For the film's visuals, Haggis's cinematographer, Roger Deakins, adopts a style similar to Zsigmond's, emphasizing wide shots and allowing the terrain to act in support of the narrative and traumatized characters. *In the Valley of Elah's* editing elicits a psychological response similar to that of *The Deer Hunter*, producing a change in social space by tampering with continuity and spatial consistency, specifically, through Jo Francis's shot matching, by crossing the 180-degree line.

*In the Valley of Elah* can be described as a police procedural whose genre conventions have been corrupted by the Iraq War context. The film's opening shot suggests this form and harks back to the new logistics of perception discussed in the previous chapter: a distorted, digital-video shot in Iraq on a cell phone, later followed by a title over a black screen which reads "Inspired by True Events". This title sequence also announces the importance of the digital image in refashioning our understanding of war. The digital image and information technology dominate the narrative structure and determine the information the viewer is privy to, despite Hank's initial resistance to this mode of technology. Hank Deerfield applies an organic approach to his quest, removing himself from the technological tools used by others and instead relying on instincts and logical enquiry. As testimony to an altered nation, this approach ultimately fails him. Mike, by contrast, never appears onscreen except for flashbacks, communicating only through the digital image. Mike's fellow soldiers murder him in a violent argument fuelled by shared trauma, but the source of Mike's trauma only becomes clear to Hank and the viewer at the end of the film.

Phone Technician: Do you want the media?

Hank: Media?

– *In the Valley of Elah*, shooting script, 2006

Hank Deerfield embarks on an investigation through the rural American southwest to Fort Rudd, New Mexico. During this investigation, Hank's past experience as a veteran provides him with the intuition and technical knowledge to follow leads as to his son's whereabouts. The film hints at Hank's past without enunciating it clearly. For example, while staying at roadside motels, Hank polishes his boots before sleeping and then makes his bed every morning using military-style folds and tucks. When passing a high school, Hank stops the car to demonstrate to the groundskeeper the proper way to raise the American flag. And, while assisting Detective Emily Sanders (Charlize Theron) in a crime scene investigation, Hank uses his acute observations of the terrain to reveal evidence of a crime—the crime that turns out to be Mike's murder. What Haggis reveals through Hank is a set of common cultural references, a sense of the collective memory of the Vietnam War that has now been eclipsed by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Although Hank Deerfield indicates that he has left Vietnam behind him, the “specter of Vietnam...buried forever in the desert sands of the Arabian Peninsula” as George H.W. Bush famously declared at the end of the Persian Gulf War, his son's murder, and the evidence of atrocity through Mike's cell-phone video resurrects this specter. A past once thought to be forgotten has acquired new meaning, one which may illuminate a larger, inter-textual message.

Hank is presented as someone detached from the technical media world of post-9/11 America, a character who is clearly the product of pre-9/11 America and still living within that mindset. He is more in touch with the physical universe and has faith that his instincts and real-life experience will ultimately lead to a positive resolution. While dining at a café, a television screen in the background shows a speech by then Presidential candidate John Kerry, and Hank is shown eating with his back turned to

the television, completely oblivious. In this sequence, Haggis communicates Hank's disassociation from the media universe, but also provides a historical allusion—both Deerfield and Kerry are Vietnam veterans, but one has disassociated himself from the Vietnam experience and the other attempted to keep the “specter of Vietnam” alive in the sphere of public debate. Later, after recovering his son's cell phone from the military barracks, Hank hires a technician to recover the data from the phone in the hope that it may generate a lead. When the technician asks if Hank would like the media (videos and still photographs) to be recovered, Hank asks, “Media?” Hank is, however, a competent analyst of organic data, revealing his past as a military policeman. After it is revealed at the end of the film's first act that Mike was murdered in the desert near his base, propelling the story into a murder mystery, Hank visits the murder site and quickly identifies clues passed over by the investigators. These include alterations to the terrain which indicate where Mike was killed and where his body was dragged, the actual colour of the car seen by witnesses, originally thought to be green but later identified as a blue car which, parked under a street light, looked green, et cetera. What is telling in Haggis's story is that Hank had allowed the post-9/11 world to pass him by. He is forced to engage with images and to cope with the fact that his pre-9/11 understanding of the American landscape failed to produce a positive resolution to his quest. Ultimately, the tragic flaw in Hank Deerfield is his faith in logical reasoning, which produces the wrong conclusions in this particular murder case.

Hank (on the phone): I can hardly hear you.

Mike (barely audible through radio static): You gotta get me outta here.

– *In the Valley of Elah*, shooting script, 2006

Through the (unseen) character of Mike Deerfield, Haggis reveals another aspect of altered American life after 9/11. In the real-life world of the film, Mike Deerfield is only seen physically as a burnt and dismembered corpse; the effects of the war have altered him not only psychologically but physically as well. The viewer only witnesses Mike in his physical form through the video diaries filmed in Iraq on his cell phone. Mike's video exemplifies Roland Barthes's view that time is what is "out of place" in the photograph; the video tells us both what "has been" and what "will be" (Barthes, 1981, 96). These videos, mimicking the many video diaries posted by soldiers on YouTube and other websites—the ones that first prompted Haggis to pursue a story about the Iraq War experience—provide Hank not only clues to his son's whereabouts but also a glimpse into the altered psychology of his son stemming from his experiences in Iraq. Haggis has Mike acting as a silent witness in this fashion to not only use his absence from the real milieu of the story as an indirect commentary on the war experience, but also as a commentary on what has become the average viewer's real-life connection to war: mass media and a broad range of information technology.

The cell-phone video of Mike Deerfield is the most vital component of the silent witness device and one of the film's overall important narrative devices in that it acts as both narrative agent and as memory. The video is what Isabelle McNeil describes as "the memory supplement", in that it is a "cultural object that elicits memory [interacting]...with shared individual memories" and supplements the "psycho-social operations of memory" (McNeil, 2010, 32). The video shifts Hank's mental perception by acting as a supplement to his memory of his son. The video is also an artifact of the war. It is comparable to war trophies and souvenirs of both previous and current wars, used to encapsulate the experience. In this case, Mike's video, as

well as other video diaries, acts as the inverse of what Paul Cornish describes as the intentions of war souvenirs. In this case, Cornish refers to World War I: “victory...plainly announced, civilian morale bolstered, and...the unit [is] responsible for the capture of such trophies” (Cornish, 2009, 12). Just as the doughboys of World War I returned with German helmets, so did Iraq War veterans return with now-worthless Iraqi currency with images of Saddam Hussein. In one scene during the film’s first act, Hank notices an Iraqi flag hung like a hunting trophy on Mike’s roommate’s wall. Mike’s video in this regard acts as a negative trophy of war that readjusts the American landscape by plainly announcing a living hell.

The cell-phone video also provides a connection between Haggis’s film and *The Deer Hunter*. Both Mike’s video and the Russian roulette sequence during *The Deer Hunter*’s second act evoke real-life images and stories in the minds of the viewer: the images of an American serviceman putting a gun to his temple evokes Eddie Adams’s “Saigon Execution” photograph, and Mike Deerfield’s cell-phone video is based both on the internet videos that Haggis viewed prior to making the film and on a true story that was told to screenwriter Mark Boal by an Iraq War veteran. The veteran Boal interviewed had run over an Iraqi child with his Humvee, and the cell-phone video from Haggis’s film records Mike and his unit doing the same. Both Haggis’s and Cimino’s film use these visual cues to demonstrate war’s alteration of the social order. Images of war, photography in the case of Vietnam and internet videos in the case of the Iraq War, have brought the war into the American cultural landscape and thus have formed a public perception of war.

The film’s references to current events contribute to its documentation of an altered American landscape. These events inform and shape the murder mystery plot of the

film. For example, the original theory of Mike's murder, proposed by Detective Sanders and endorsed by Hank, was that the crime was the work of Mexican gangs. The theory is supported by a revelation that U.S. servicemen had been smuggling drugs from Kuwait and selling them to Mexican drug gangs, and this lead is further acted upon, investigated on the Internet by Detective Sanders and, later, through the arrest and questioning of a Latino soldier with a criminal record, Robert Ortiz (Victor Wolf). Drug crime from Mexican drug cartels spilling over into the American southwest border-states has been a prominent issue in post-9/11 culture, shaping much of the political discussion on issues such as immigration.<sup>9</sup> In this sub-section of the story, Haggis reveals a disturbing link between his story and real-life events, such as the story of Andres Raya, discussed earlier. Prior to Ortiz's arrest, a military policeman advises Hank that Ortiz was allowed to enter the army with a criminal record because the military had "lowered the standards every month since this started". By referencing current events, Haggis places his film in stark contrast to films like *The Deer Hunter* and *Born on the Fourth of July*.

Haggis also directly acknowledges the concept and ramification of PTSD, a condition which is more fully understood and physiologically mapped now than it was during the production of *The Deer Hunter*.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the film, Haggis directly references this condition through his characters. For example, Detective Sanders is confronted with a case of animal cruelty (the drowning of a family Doberman) stemming from PTSD breakdown. This particular episode later in the film results in the murder of a serviceman's wife, the one who reported the animal cruelty, an act which alters Detective Sanders's perception of the Deerfield investigation. During the investigation of Mike's death, Hank, when emotionally pushed, exhibits characteristics of servicemen coping with PTSD—his eyes go dead, his speech



becomes monotone, and he sheds no tears—as if to suggest that the PTSD that Mike suffered from was inadvertently transferred to Hank. At the time of the film’s release, the Department of Veterans Affairs had diagnosed 130,000 cases of psychological illness in veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan (Glantz, 2009, 6). Additionally, an investigative report from PBS’s *Frontline* revealed that “Fort Carson has seen [in the last five years] thirty-six of its soldiers commit suicide...seventeen have been charged or convicted of murder, attempted murder, or manslaughter”.

Despite the fact that the film is both a critique of and a counter-narrative to the social portrait in *The Deer Hunter*, Haggis’s film utilizes a similar visual approach. For example, Deakins uses landscape as an expressive character in the film, which I will discuss later. Deakins also frames the film’s characters against these landscapes through wide-angle shots which allow the landscape to dwarf the characters (as shown through the example discussed below). Deakins, however, departs from Zsigmond’s approach by way of technical adjustments to composition and camera movement. The camera lens, for example, is kept at 40mm or less, a technique that allows for the subjects, regardless of the frame composition, to always be kept at an (uncomfortable) distance.

Deakins also relies on very little camera movement to incite discomfort. The figures below (Figs. 3.13–3.14) are from a sequence in which Hank Deerfield visits a highway rest stop while searching for his missing son. Hank exits his vehicle to approach the restroom (Fig. 3.13). This shot is the scene’s establishing shot, rather than a wide shot of the whole property. The next shot (Fig. 3.14) is a wide shot showing Hank walking towards the restroom. This composition of these two shots keeps Hank’s mental distress in the forefront of the narrative without conveying this

emotion through dialogue or even through facial expression, allowing the audience's imagination and worst fears to fill in the gap. The wide shot keeps the audience at a distance from Hank, only slightly panning with him as he approaches the restroom entrance. Deakins characterized this approach as somewhat of a documentary approach. The audience is transported from the position of casual observer to the role of emotional participant in a narrative with strong political undertones (Nelson, 2009). It is important to note that Deakins also 'crosses the line' when going from his medium establishing shot to his wide shot, in order to create an atmosphere of confusion and to contribute to the psychological atmosphere created by Jo Francis's pacing and shot juxtaposition.



Fig. 3.13. Hank Deerfield in Roger Deakins's medium shot, serving as the scene's establishing shot, *In the Valley of Elah* (Warner Independent, 2007).



Fig. 3.14. A Roger Deakins wide shot from *In the Valley of Elah* (Warner Independent, 2007), a visual nod to Vilmos Zsigmond's use of landscape and partially obstructed views in *The Deer Hunter*.

Jo Francis's technique of interrupting continuity, combined with Deakins's camera crossing the 180-degree parallel, places the construction of Haggis's narrative on grounds similar to Peter Zinner's editing approach in *The Deer Hunter*. Francis is able to capture jarring moments with this technique that echoes the jump cut from John Welsh's bar to the rural Vietnamese village. Francis's use of these editing techniques to underscore the psychology of characters is more manifest than Zinner's use of these techniques in *The Deer Hunter*. The sequence shown below (Figs. 2.15–2.17) depicts a scene early in the film where Hank stops in front of his town's high school in order to instruct an El Salvadorian immigrant on the proper way to hoist the American flag. Hank advises the man that if the American flag is flown upside down, it is a distress signal to other nations (Fig. 3.15). Francis cuts to a shot that crosses the line, a wide shot from the opposite end of the school's front lawn, showing Hank silently walking away, his head bent downwards. Before Hank can exit the frame, Francis abruptly cuts to a shot of Hank driving down the freeway, listening to talk radio discuss the upcoming (2004) election. Here, Francis creates an atmosphere where mental distress prompted by a war experience is invoked through both performance and visual style. Hank Deerfield's dispassionate mien is clearly invoked

through Tommy Lee Jones's performance and Francis's editing—a treatment of space and figure that contrasts with the emotive performances contained in *The Deer Hunter*.



Fig. 3.15. Hank Deerfield discussing the proper way to treat the American flag, *In the Valley of Elah* (Warner Independent, 2007).



Fig. 3.16. Hank Deerfield leaving the high school grounds, one second before jump cutting the next shot (Fig. 2.13), *In the Valley of Elah* (Warner Independent, 2007).



Fig. 3.17. Jump cut to Hank Deerfield listening to talk radio, *In the Valley of Elah* (Warner Independent, 2007).

The use of landscape in the film is important to Haggis's examination of the Iraq War shaping American lives but also to the film's inherent political intentions. In a study of the American southwest as an iconic, as well as political, setting for a recent string of American films (notably *In the Valley of Elah* and the Coen Brothers' 2007 film *No Country for Old Men*), Joan Mellen argues that *In the Valley of Elah* "offers a commentary on American identity: a nation deformed by war" by perverting the camaraderie depicted in *The Deer Hunter* within the vast landscape of America's frontier territory (Mellen, 2008, 31). The use of landscape, in this case, establishes *In the Valley of Elah* as a counter-narrative to *The Deer Hunter* in two ways. Haggis transports a post-war trauma story to a land that is barren physically and psychologically, and he uses the specific location, in this case New Mexico, to make a direct political statement about a war still in progress.



Fig. 3.18. A nation in distress: the final shot from *In the Valley of Elah* (Warner Independent, 2007).

The use of barren and distorted landscapes in Haggis's film works in conjunction with its final sequence, in which Hank returns to the school yard flag pole and instructs the Salvadorian custodian to fly the flag upside. Hank, who duct tapes the hoisting ropes to the pole to ensure that the flag is not taken down, sees the need to signal a national distress call at the end of his journey. In this scene, it is American iconography, specifically an icon with a distinct presence in earlier war films such as the World War II combat film, which is altered alongside the altered landscapes of the American southwest (Fig. 3.18).

*In the Valley of Elah's* engagement with genre memory differs from that of *The Deer Hunter* and the other films discussed in this thesis in that it does not adopt the framework of previous war films as its point of departure. The police procedural and murder mystery film provides the foundation for Haggis' to voice his critique of the Iraq War and U.S. foreign policy. Haggis' film distinguishes itself from previous veteran films in that it is more attuned to the social consequences stemming from U.S. involvement in wars overseas, and a more detailed understanding of PTSD, and its social ramifications, informs this critique. Nevertheless, *In the Valley of Elah*, like *Redacted* and the other contemporary war films featured in this thesis, does recall



films like *The Deer Hunter* and other previous war films in order to speak in a distinctly post-9/11 (or Iraq War generation) voice. A film grammar similar to the one used in *The Deer Hunter* is also employed but coupled with the new logistics of perception, explained through Patricia Pisters in the previous chapter and exemplified by Mike Deerfield's cell phone video, to create a veteran film that belongs firmly in the post-9/11 canon and contends with Vietnam veteran film.

"More dangerous than the streets of Baghdad"

In the George Gittoes documentary *Rampage* (Australia, 2006), a follow up to his previous documentary *Soundtrack to War* (2005), the filmmaker travels to the "Brown Sub" of Miami to interview rap artist/Iraq War veteran Elliot Lovett. Upon his entry to the ghetto, Gittoes's car is closely followed by another car driven by young men who appear to be gang members. When Gittoes arrives at Lovett's home, he is advised that the car that followed him was engaging in a military-style convoy support, to ensure Gittoes's safe passage through the ghetto. Lovett had previously told Gittoes that Miami is "more dangerous than the streets of Baghdad", and Gittoes's arrival in Lovett's neighborhood signals an Iraq War experience that has reshaped the social order of an already hostile environment. As with the story of Andres Raya, Lovett's life exhibits how the post-war veteran experience has altered the American social space in a way that is ever-present in Paul Haggis's film: Haggis and Gittoes are drawing a parallel between the experience of servicemen in Iraq and the harsh realities of the American homeland in a way that goes beyond what Michael Cimino and his New Hollywood contemporaries may have envisioned.

On the one hand, *The Deer Hunter* brings into relief the effect the Vietnam War had upon the psyches of the people who fought in the war and those who did not, as a way of providing an almost Romantic portrait of post-Vietnam America. *In the Valley of Elah*, on the other hand, extends this examination of a war-altered social order to a cinematic terrain that acts as both a political and a social critique and contends with the Vietnam veteran film. What Haggis's film attempts to remind the viewer is that not only has the 'specter of Vietnam' been resurrected, but the consequences of how war shapes our culture and society have become more dire, a direct correlation being made between actions on the battlefield and the home front. *The Deer Hunter*'s Mike Vronsky and *In the Valley of Elah*'s Hank Deerfield both come to the realization that although their war experience has ended, they will continue to fight at home, in their minds, in their families, and, now, through the digital universe.

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> FBI Intelligence Assessment, "Gang-Related Activity in The U.S. Armed Forces Increasing". Prepared by National Gang Intelligence Center. January 12, 2007. [http://www.stripes.com/07/feb07/gangs/ncis\\_gangs.pdf](http://www.stripes.com/07/feb07/gangs/ncis_gangs.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> A Soviet invention from 1945, the SKS (Samozaryadnyj Karbin sistemy Simonova) was a forbearer of the Kalashnikov. The Russians, Soviet client states, the Chinese, and others used this weapon during the mid-twentieth century. It has been illegal in the United States since 1994 and was never used by the U.S. military. Raya or his criminal outfit would have acquired this weapon illegally, and Raya would have transferred his M4 carbine assault rifle skills (the weapon he would most likely have used in Iraq) to use of the SKS.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that *The Best Years of Our Lives* cinematographer Gregg Toland served in World War II as a lieutenant in the U.S. navy's film unit. His use of deep focus, in Wyler's film and in others, had a profound influence on the cinematographers of New Hollywood, including *The Deer Hunter*'s cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond.

<sup>4</sup> Though much has been written about trauma theory and war cinema, it is not the aim of this thesis to further explore or elaborate on this theory. What I will do is show how trauma and PTSD are aesthetically rendered in the war film, contemporary war films in particular, through the veteran character and through the war film trope of haunting, an issue which I will return to in chapter five.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Cimino. *The Deer Hunter*. Director's Commentary track for the UK edition of the film. Universal Pictures, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Cimino. *The Deer Hunter*. Director's Commentary track for the UK edition of the film. Universal Pictures, 1978.

<sup>7</sup> According to Cimino, the film was shot in reverse chronology to achieve this effect. See Michael Cimino. *The Deer Hunter*. Director's Commentary track for the UK edition of the film. Universal Pictures, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> The idea of the war veteran never actually leaving the battle site can be read in war cinema as haunting, a trope which permeates the genre and one which I will discuss in chapter five.



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<sup>9</sup> For example, the debate over the 2010 Arizona State Senate Bill 1070, a controversial act concerning the detainment and processing of suspected illegal immigrants.

<sup>10</sup> PTSD is defined by the American Psychiatric Association as present when a “person has been exposed to a traumatic event...[and] the traumatic event is persistently re-experienced in one (or more) of the following ways: 1) distressing recollections of the event, 2) distressing dreams of the event, 3) acting or feeling as if the event were reoccurring, 4) psychological distress at exposure to cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the event, and 5) psychological reactivity of cues that resemble an aspect of the event” (Glantz, 2009, 8).

### Chapter Three

#### **“We are met by the colour line”: Race and national mythology in post-9/11 combat films**



Fig. 4.1. Joe Rosenthal's flag-raising photograph (left), evoked by the flag-raising at Ground Zero (right)

At the 2008 Cannes Film Festival, African-American filmmaker Spike Lee, while promoting his World War II film *The Miracle at St. Anna* (2008), described his film as a response to Clint Eastwood's World War II film *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006).<sup>1</sup> Eastwood's film, relating the events surrounding the flag-raising on Mt. Suribachi, Lee argued, denigrated the memory of African American soldiers by not featuring any in the film. Black soldiers, while not present at the flag-raising, were present at the Battle of Iwo Jima. Although Lee's observation is not completely accurate—Eastwood's film does, in fact, contain scenes with Black soldiers as part of segregated medical units (a historically accurate representation)—Lee's critique is of particular interest to the study of recent film history, as it can be extended beyond *Flags of Our Fathers* to a broader question regarding post-9/11 war cinema. The relationship between race and national identity, as defined by a unit's combat experience, appears

to be largely absent from post-9/11 war films. War films produced during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars apparently fail to explore the histories of minority servicemen in current or previous American wars. Recent debates concerning national identity and American mythology might offer an insight into the seeming disavowal of race in contemporary U.S. war films, debates that illustrate competing interpretations of national identity and national mythology that emerged after 9/11.

One such debate, a 2010 New Year's Eve broadcast of KCRW Santa Monica's program *Left, Right, and Center*, featured a discussion on the future of American exceptionalism, a topic predicted to figure strongly in the 2012 U.S. Presidential election. Tony Blankley, representing the American political right on the show, positioned American exceptionalism as both a political and historical vantage point: "[Americans] can't walk away from the greatness that [they] find themselves with...there are special burdens and responsibilities...that come with it". Robert Scheer, speaking for the American political left, cautioned against the creation of an exclusive American mythology under the guise of exceptionalism, one that would ignore American diversity and be subject to human fallibility (KCRW, 2010).

In this chapter, I argue that post-9/11 American identity is being renegotiated along the lines drawn by the debate over American exceptionalism, and further that post-9/11 American historical cinema can be seen as a privileged site for the staging of this debate. Historical films have, in recent years, acquired a new cultural mandate or orientation, expressing the multitude of histories that constitute the larger American story or endorsing a reinforced version of American exceptionalism. The post-9/11 war film, however, has apparently failed to address this debate directly. It has neither

expressed the varied histories of American servicemen, drawn from a diverse citizenry, nor offered a convincing portrayal of American exceptionalism.<sup>2</sup>

As I have discussed in previous chapters, the role of information technology and mass media in both American culture and American military strategy has played a significant role in constructing new visual modes and narrative themes in post-9/11 war films, expanding the narrative capacities of these films and acknowledging war's multi-mediated face. The war film as a vehicle for exploring the concept of national identity, however, has also adopted a narrower gaze after 9/11 than the films of previous decades. Vietnam War films, in particular, acknowledged the complexities of national identity and its multi-tiered composition. Although there are post-9/11 war films that do effectively examine the fashioning and refashioning of American identity, such as Paul Haggis's *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), issues concerning the formation of national identity, issues of race in particular, have not received the same level of explicit attention from contemporary filmmakers as was present in war films released in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Spike Lee's *The Miracle of St. Anna* is an exception but was not successful at provoking the same level of debate as older war films with a similar focus – namely the Vietnam War films of the 1970s and 1980s, such as *Platoon* (1986) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).

This topic is worthy of exploration not merely due to the differences between the Iraq generation and the Vietnam generation, however, but also because of the similarities. Historians and sociologists can point to similar conditions of poverty and urban crime that have persisted, intensified in many cases, from the 1960s onward. Yet, it is the echo of Vietnam-era attitudes in the African American community which, in my view, indicates that histories of the Black soldier experience are still relevant to the

broader conversation. In 1969, a *Newsweek* poll reported that African Americans believed, 7 to 1, that the “cost of the Vietnam War directly affected the amount of money that could be spent on anti-poverty programs at home” (Stanford, 2008, 222). During the war, Eldridge Cleaver proclaimed: “Those who most bitterly oppose Negro progress are the most ardent advocates of a belligerent foreign policy” (222). Just how congruent these attitudes towards foreign policy in these two distinct eras actually are became evident just after the Iraq War began. As reported in *USA Today*, a demonstration against the invasion of Iraq was held in front of New York’s Riverside Church, where, in 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. said that “America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continue to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube” (Wickham, 2003). Considering the debate on post-9/11 American exceptionalism and how it relates to African American history during the Iraq War, the condition of Black America appears to resonate with the words of King and Cleaver, and investigations tend to confirm this view. In 2007, *The New York Times* reported a sharp drop in military recruitment amongst African Americans (13% in 2006, down from 23% in 2001), citing potential recruits who claimed that it was already “a continuous fight waking up and walking the streets every day” (Abruzzese, 2007).

The work of Seymour Martin Lipset is seminal to my analysis of war films and their discourse on American exceptionalism. Lipset defines American exceptionalism as the absence of class-consciousness in U.S. History, “no significant socialist movements” inherent to “post-feudal societies” (Lipset, 1996, 23). Although Lipset also characterizes American exceptionalism as the rejection of “the idea of rigid hereditary classes”, he identifies America’s Black minority as an exception;

America's white majority has been historically more inclined to accept this interpretation of American exceptionalism than African Americans have (Lipset, 1996, 113). Contending interpretations of American exceptionalism, such as this, appear to have informed the stories of the American experience as told by minority groups, and historical films stand alongside literature and poetry as a powerful art form by which to tell these stories. The war film is an effective mode for rehearsing minority stories and contesting notions of American exceptionalism, as, according to Lipset, American military history is an important component of the American exceptionalism debate. One's participation in war can be seen as "the supreme test of citizenship and adherence to the national will" (Lipset, 1996, 20).

Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers* addresses the American exceptionalism debate through a re-examination of the mythology of war heroism. In an interview for the British Film Institute, Eastwood was asked, "How vital was it to deconstruct the hero myth?" Eastwood responded: "Very important...because in the era we're in now everyone is being considered a hero".<sup>3</sup> One way in which *Flags of Our Fathers* performs this deconstruction is by reconsidering the legacy of Ira Hayes, a Native American belonging to Arizona's Pima tribe and one of the Mt. Suribachi flag raisers, within the context of a nation reconfiguring its own identity in the midst of warfare some sixty years after the Battle of Iwo Jima. Eastwood's film is clearly aware of the mythology surrounding Hayes, one which arose after his death in 1955 in the form of songs, books, and poetry. Eastwood distinguishes his film from Allan Dwan's *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) or Delbert Mann's *The Outsider* (1961), the latter a film solely about the life of Ira Hayes (portrayed by Tony Curtis), by moving Hayes's story beyond the traditional, hero narrative, and instead focusing on how the concept of American heroism was manufactured in World War II. I argue that *Flags of Our*

*Fathers* critiques both sides of the American exceptionalism debate by using Ira Hayes's story to deconstruct the notion of heroism and defining distinctions of race.

John Irvin's *Hamburger Hill* (1987) provides a striking point of comparison for *Flags of Our Fathers*, as it critiques both sides of an earlier interpretation of American exceptionalism but does so using a different strategy. *Hamburger Hill* is a Vietnam War film, based on the true story of the taking of Hill 937 in the Ashau Valley in 1969. The film follows the traditional code of the World War II combat film, but brings the social and racial conflicts occurring on the American home front to the fore on the battlefield. Through its multi-ethnic cast, the film attempts to reconcile the voices competing to define the Vietnam War experience, arguments still fresh in the minds of many at the time of the film's release. Although *Hamburger Hill* has been described as a patriotic film that sanctifies the memory of Vietnam—"an uncritical, war-is-photogenic-hell excursion...[that] proposes...that we honor and respect the men who suffered...without even beginning to consider why they did so" (Rosenbaum, 1987)—Irvin's film, in my view, conveys a more complex set of perspectives. Through its use of varied histories, it provides a challenge to the dominant American war mythology. The film's black medic, Abraham "Doc" Johnson (Courtney B. Vance), serves the film not only as what Hal Hinson refers to as "the squad's emotional center ... [and] the unofficial spiritual leader of the blacks in the squad", but also as a mouthpiece for the sentiments of the black community back in America (Hinson, 1987). Public attitudes towards foreign policy in the African American community, documented during both the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, are communicated through Doc. There is no mythology surrounding Johnson or his comrades, and the actual battle for Hamburger Hill is remembered as a negative charge to the American story. The prosecution of the battle was severely criticized by

the United States Congress and the American press, prompting, as some have argued, the draw-down of troops by then President Richard Nixon.

According to Anthony D. Smith, war “acts as a mobilizer of ethnic sentiments and national consciousness, a centralizing force of life...and a provider of myths and memories for future generations” (Smith, 1991, 27). *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Hamburger Hill* appear to challenge Smith’s conception of the consensus-building characteristics of war. Both films do so through their respective treatments of characters, specifically Ira Hayes and “Doc” Johnson, who are defined as racial ‘others’, as providers of ‘myths and memories’. The difference between these two films, however, highlights striking revisions in American war mythology between the post-Vietnam and the post-9/11 period, revisions which I will illustrate through a comparison of the two films. In *Flags of Our Fathers*, the treatment of Ira Hayes challenges Ernest Renan’s notion of what constitutes national myth-creation, fictions elevated to symbolism that defines a nation’s perception of itself (Renan 1882).<sup>4</sup> *Hamburger Hill*, by comparison, confirms Richard Hofstadter’s view that “both historians and agitators are the makers of myths” (Kohn, 1957, 13).



The Buffalo Soldier: From World War II combat films to the Vietnam War film



Fig. 4.2. U.S. Office of Wartime Information propaganda poster, circa 1943.

In his 1944 article, “The Negro vs. Nazism”, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. wrote: “...the American Negro recognized Hitler long ago; we recognized him immediately because he was a cheap imitation of the Hitlers that we have had here in America for years....Hitlerism is merely an old story with new labels” (Stanford, 2008, 161–162). These words characterize both the African American response to the spread of fascism and also much of the U.S. Office of Wartime Information (OWI) propaganda used to mobilize America against fascism. Thomas Doherty observes: “equating...‘Hitlerism abroad with Hitlerism at home,’ the Negro press and the [NAACP] exploited wartime exigencies to advance their cause in the entertainment industry and to improve the lot of black actors on the screen” (Doherty, 1993, 206).

These sentiments are evident in the combat films released during World War II, but the results can be viewed from two different perspectives. On the one hand, many of these films affirmed a story of America that differentiated itself from the Nazi

narrative. Films such as *Bataan* (MGM, 1943) and *Sahara* (Columbia Pictures, 1943) depicted American servicemen from mixed ethnic and social backgrounds fighting alongside one another for a common purpose, racial and religious differences dissolved through a shared combat experience. On the other hand, the reality of the situation in the U.S. military—segregated units, racist policies regarding blood donation, et cetera—conflicted dramatically with Hollywood’s presentation of the black soldier’s life. Furthermore, these films did not rehearse any narratives from the perspective of black soldiers, partly as this would be seen as antithetical to OWI propaganda, endorsed by the studios and organizations such as the NAACP, and also because the public scope of the African American story had yet to broaden under the Civil Rights movement, which would intensify in the two decades following the war.



Fig. 4.3. *The Walking Dead* (Savoy Pictures, 1995) and *Dead Presidents* (Buena Vista, 1995), two examples from the 1990s of films concerning African American servicemen in Vietnam.

While films from the late 1980s and 1990s, such as *The Walking Dead* (Preston A. Whitmore, Savoy Pictures, 1995) and *Dead Presidents* (Albert and Allen Hughes, Buena Vista, 1995), would provide a history specifically focused on the lives of African Americans who served in Vietnam, many of the mainstream Vietnam War films were also concerned with racial identity as a vehicle for providing commentary on racial division in the American homeland.

*Hamburger Hill* provides a good case study of this narrative strategy because it recasts a broad range of voices from the public debate on the Vietnam War during the 1960s in the form of soldier characters thrust into deadly circumstances. Although the film depicts real events, dramatic license is clearly taken with the creation of the film's central characters. Even though Johnson and the other characters depicted in the film are purported to be the actual participants in the battle for Hamburger Hill, no mythology surrounds his participation in the war.<sup>5</sup> Johnson is a key character in the film as he acts as an avatar for the African American communities back home. At the same time, Johnson appears to grapple with the notion of war dissolving ethnic identities into a single national identity.

#### Who was Abraham "Doc" Johnson?

Through a reconsideration of traditional war film codes, *Hamburger Hill* recasts a bleak moment in American history as a positive affirmation of a revised American mythology. The real battle for Hamburger Hill took place the same year as the moon landing. It is a moment in history which does not register in American mythology at anywhere close to the same scale as the Battle of Iwo Jima. *Life Magazine* coverage of the battle prompted a heated debate on the future of U.S. involvement in Vietnam

on the floor of the United States Congress and, as some have argued, prompted President Richard Nixon to reduce troop numbers. John Irvin's film acknowledges the battle as a pivotal moment in the history of the Vietnam War, but he does so by using the film's characters to mirror a nation divided at home.

*Hamburger Hill* combines a documentary approach with the traditional standard of the World War II combat film, the diverse yet cohesive unit, to reconsider the heroism behind a war whose mythology was being contested by other Hollywood war films. In the film, Irvin uses his characters as representative voices of a nation divided back home, characters that either support the mission or find it futile, are either troubled by or supportive of war protests back home, and who are ambivalent to such sentiment and merely want to get home alive. In attempting to reconcile race with national identity, Johnson, an African American medic who was killed in action during the taking of Hamburger Hill, becomes the voice of the Civil Rights movement in the thick of battle.



Fig. 4.4. A Vietnamese child dwarfed by American military technology in the first act of *Hamburger Hill* (RKO, 1987), and a possible throwback to Peter Davies' *Hearts and Minds* (BBS Productions, 1974).

Even before its opening title sequence, Irvin signifies the film as a homage to the World War II combat film through the use of an old RKO logo from the 1940s. The title sequence proceeds with Philip Glass's military march score and title cards providing the historic background of the battle for Hill 937. There are then images of Washington, D.C., on a cold morning, ending with a tracking shot along the Vietnam Memorial wall, indicating the film's intention of re-mythologizing the heroes of the Vietnam War eighteen years after the events depicted. Thus, from the start of the film, Irvin signals to the audience that what they are about to see is very different from Stone's, Coppola's, or even Cimino's take on the Vietnam War. During the first act, the narrative strategies of the World War II combat film are employed, coupled with visual nods to previous Vietnam films—*Apocalypse Now* and *Hearts and Minds*, in particular (Fig. 4.4). The combat unit central to the film is a diverse group (Caucasian, African American, Irish descent, Italian descent, etc.) which, at first glance, appears to be united behind a single purpose: leaving Vietnam to pursue their post-war dreams. When the mission of returning to the Ashau Valley is revealed, this unity, whether real or imagined, begins to unravel. Each character then assumes the role of other characters from the public debate on the war back home, save the platoon Sergeant Adam Franz (Dylan McDermott), who tells his men: "I'm an orphan...Mom drinks...Dad coughs blood...I have ringworm...and the draft ruined my chances of being a brain surgeon. People, you are in Vietnam. You have no problems except me and [Charlie]".

Doc Johnson is first introduced upon his return from rest and recuperation (R & R) in Bangkok. He is seen walking through the streets of an unnamed Vietnamese village, his arms around two fellow black servicemen, singing Smokey Robinson's *Lifetime of Devotion*. He is greeted back at the base by Sergeant Franz, with whom Doc appears

to have a close bond. When one of Doc's comrades, an African American soldier, asks Franz for a desk job back at the headquarters after hearing that the platoon is due to return to the Ashau Valley, Doc berates the soldier, saying, "They don't take niggers back at the headquarters. All the white motherfuckers are there". From this introduction, Irvin channels oppositional sentiments to the war, in particular one proclaiming the war as a rich, white man's affair, through Johnson, beliefs that are secondary only to his impulse, and duty, to keep his comrades alive, irrespective of their origins.



Fig. 4.5. Doc Johnson instructing the soldiers of the 101st Airborne on how to brush their teeth while on assignment.

Doc's imperative is made clear in the following scene (Fig. 4.5). In the role of field medic, he instructs a racially integrated group of soldiers on how to brush their teeth while on patrol deep in enemy territory: "brush your teeth in a rapid vertical motion. That is up and down for you rebels". He walks around the men as they brush their teeth, advising them of the various diseases that Americans are more susceptible to in Vietnam ("ringworm...crotch rot..."). When one white soldier spits out his toothpaste, Doc looks the soldier straight in the eye and asks, "What are you doing?" The white soldier responds, "Oh come on. Lighten up, bro". Doc counters: "I am not



your brother. If you want to walk out of this...place you will listen to people who know". In this moment, Doc bridges the line between the attitudes on the home front and the battlefield. He makes it clear that a division between races is still strong and exists in both America and Vietnam, but he also makes it clear that survival runs deeper than skin colour.

Irvin and Carabatsos enable the more specific sentiments of African American social movements, such as the Black Panthers lead by Eldridge Cleaver and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee lead by Stokely Carmichael, to be conveyed through Doc during a moment at the edge of a river later on in the film's first act. He listens as other black soldiers discuss their post-war plans. When one soldier proclaims that he plans to walk up Central Avenue proudly wearing his uniform, he is questioned by a white soldier who advises the black soldier not to wear his jump boots. Doc immediately responds: "Who's talking to you? This man has been fighting for the ... 'United States of White America,' and you're going to try to advise him that he can't wear his jump boots?"



Fig. 4.6. The death of Abraham "Doc" Johnson in *Hamburger Hill* (RKO, 1987).



Fig. 4.7. The death of Robert Gould Shaw (Matthew Broderick) and Trip (Denzel Washington) in *Glory* (Tri Star Pictures, 1989).

When the film enters its second act, Irvin shifts to a near-documentary approach. Title cards providing specific dates in May 1969 are shown as the battle for Hill 937 progresses. The actions of each day of the battle are shown in a traditional, narrative war film format but specific moments in combat (death scenes, especially) focus the narrative to offer a sense of verisimilitude, history being preserved through Irvin's film. It is through Doc's death towards the end of the film's second act (Fig. 4.6) that Irvin and Carabatsos dissolve the feelings of racial division within both the unit and the country back home.

Doc Johnson dies from a wound he sustains during the events of May 18. After being shot during an uphill battle in heavy rain and mud, he is removed from the battlefield and taken back to the headquarters, where he is comforted by Sergeant Franz and "Motown", an African American soldier. Doc first turns to Motown and says, "It's OK, blood. I don't feel a thing". Motown assures Doc that he will recover and return home. Doc counters Motown, saying, "That's just what the world needs, another nigger with a limp". Franz then interjects, objecting to Doc's attitude, but Doc turns to Franz and says, "I'm not omitting you, blood....Take that hill. Those bastards back in



the real world will never take that from me”. After these words, Doc slowly fades away, and Franz, Motown, and Doc embrace, providing a visual symbol of a cohesive national identity forged from a shared combat experience.

The imagery of this scene brings to mind the purported intentions of the diverse combat unit of World War II combat films. When we bleed, the “blood [is] the same color” (Doherty, 1993, 206). When facing death, racial and ethnic identity completely blends into the idea of unified nationhood. The same idea was evoked two years later in Edward Zwick’s *Glory* (1989), a film depicting the American Civil War and with a sharper focus on the ideas of race and nationhood (Fig. 4.7). In Zwick’s film, the death of the real-life central character, white colonel Robert Gould Shaw (Matthew Broderick), alongside the war’s first black regiment, reaffirms what *Hamburger Hill* and its predecessors proposed. Both films, therefore, are what Robert Burgoyne describes as an “endorsement of a ‘mystic nationhood’ revealed only on the battlefield...reaffirming the dominant fiction at the site of its greatest potential harm” (Burgoyne, 2010, 36).

“The Ballad of Ira Hayes”: The hero myth reconsidered in Clint Eastwood’s *Flags of Our Fathers*

*There they battled on Iwo Jima’s hill,  
Two hundred and fifty men  
But only twenty-seven lived to walk back down again*

*And when the fight was over  
And when old glory raised  
Among the men that held it high  
Was the Indian, Ira Hayes.*

–“The Ballad of Ira Hayes”, Johnny Cash

Anthony Smith argues that historical films specialize in “the reconstruction of ethnographs,” citing, as an example, the famous Odessa steps sequence from Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* as a scene that projects a national myth in a way “that is poetic and popular rather than strictly factual” (Smith 2000, 55). *Flags of Our Fathers* is a film that seeks to perform this task in reverse; Eastwood is critical of a national mythology that is “poetic and popular” and presents in its place a demystification of nationalism and patriotism.<sup>6</sup> The mythology surrounding Joe Rosenthal’s iconic flag-raising photograph is challenged alongside competing notions of a national identity forged by a nation at war. The lives of those present in Rosenthal’s photograph, and the haunting memories these individuals experience, are used in Eastwood’s film to bring into relief a post-9/11 discourse on war and national identity that seeks to affirm certain aspects of American exceptionalism while at the same time offering a criticism of other aspects. The Native American character of Ira Hayes serves as perhaps the film’s most potent critique of an American war hero mythology resurrected in the wake of 9/11, a hero mythology constructed by the media and popular cultural memory.

Jacquelyn Kilpatrick has written that “American Indian heroism during the war made it more difficult to think of native peoples...as the savages of the traditional Western” (Kilpatrick, 1999, 87). The mythology of Ira Hayes confirms Kilpatrick’s observations, serving as a Civil Rights era rebuttal to the mythologized America of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The mythology surrounding Ira Hayes developed after his death in 1955 and played the dual role of redefining the post-war image of the American hero and contesting America’s earlier image of the traditional hero. Clint Eastwood draws upon this mythology, however, in order to make a far-

reaching critique of the construction of the hero myth. The Ira Hayes of *Flags of Our Fathers* is not merely the victim of racism, he is the victim of a socially constructed hero myth—one which conveyed a new meaning after 9/11. The post-9/11 hero mythology is deconstructed in Eastwood's film by drawing a parallel with a hero mythology from the past, and the story of Ira Hayes provides Eastwood with the essential tools with which to perform this deconstruction.



Fig. 4.8. Joe Rosenthal's photograph of the flag-raising on Mt. Suribachi (Ira Hayes, first from left).



Fig. 4.9. Eddie Adams's photograph of *The Saigon Execution*.

First, consider the difference between two iconic photographs and the ensuing public response: Rosenthal's *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* (Fig. 4.8), and Adams's *The Saigon Execution* (Fig. 4.9). At the beginning of *Flags of Our Fathers*, an elderly John Bradley reflects on the importance of the Rosenthal photo: "Now, the right picture can win or lose a war. Look at Vietnam. That picture of that South Vietnamese officer blowing that fella's brains out the side of his head.... That was it. The war was lost". Just as Rosenthal's photograph embodied what the American public, through OWI war propaganda and Hollywood films, had long imaged war heroism to be, Adam's photograph embodied the gruesome brutality that the Vietnam War became, signaling a sharp disconnect between mythology and reality. In light of this, we can say that Adams's photograph de-mythologizes and Rosenthal's photograph mythologizes, but Rosenthal's photograph involves the creation of a very specific element of national mythology which is relevant to the discussion of the mythology of Ira Hayes. In their analysis of *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima*, Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites argue that the photograph provides "a coordinated visual transcription of three powerful discourses in America: egalitarianism, nationalism, and civic republicanism" (Hairman & Lucaites, 2007, 94–95). The egalitarianism expressed in Rosenthal's photo underscores the Hayes mythology and the mythology that is contested in Eastwood's film. This egalitarianism is identified by the fact that we see no faces, the uniforms are identical, and there is no brass or indication of rank present; "they are equal to the task because they are equal alongside each other" (Hairman & Lucaites, 2007, 98). *Flags of Our Fathers*, however, challenges the collective identity expressed in the photograph by drawing out the complex individual stories of those depicted there.



Fig. 4.10. Cultural references to Rosenthal's photograph: (left to right) the cover the punk rock band Anti-Flags 1999 album "A New Kind of Army," a custom tattoo on the back of U.S. military serviceman, and the cover of an April, 2008 edition of *Time Magazine*.

Perhaps one of the primary reasons that Eastwood's film contends with the hero mythology stemming from Rosenthal's photograph is that the memory contained in the photograph has been so absorbed by American culture, through the photograph's ubiquitous presence in popular culture, that it has become a memory believed to be shared by all. This form of memory is what Alison Landsberg calls "prosthetic memory," memories that are experienced as "a result of an engagement with a wide range of cultural technologies" and "become part of one's personal archive of experience" even though that memory does not actually belong to that person (Landsberg 2004, 26)(fig. 4.10). When memory embeds itself into cultural artifacts in such a way, it can be difficult to challenge or dislodge, but *Flags of Our Fathers* demonstrates that film, especially the historical film (war films and other historical films), is an effective tool for providing a counter narrative to the mythology that underscores these memories. Part of the mythology surrounding the flag-raising photograph involves a mythology of Ira Hayes himself, promoted through film and song. To examine how Eastwood contends with the previous mythology of Ira Hayes, in service of his overall critique of previous American war myths, let us compare

previous treatments of Ira Hayes as an American mythic figure in relation to the portrayal in *Flags of Our Fathers*.



Fig. 4.11. An advertisement for Delbert Mann's *The Outsider* (Universal, 1961).

In 1959, William Bradford Huie published *The Outsider*, detailing the post-war life of Ira Hayes. Huie's story was later made into a film of the same name with Tony Curtis in the role of Hayes. Delbert Mann's film of *The Outsider* establishes the character of Ira Hayes through a reversal of the veteran trope discussed in the previous chapter. The film begins with Ira Hayes collecting his friend Jay, a serviceman and fellow Pima Indian, from a bus stop (Fig. 4.12). On the drive home, Ira asks Jay whether the men he served with "are friendly". Jay's response is "Sure", and Ira then reveals to Jay that he has enlisted in the Marine Corps. Their drive through Arizona's Gila River Pima Indian Reservation is framed by cinematographer Joseph LaSelle to suggest isolation; both men are about to embark on journeys which will become testimonies of their individuality.



Fig. 4.12. Jay (Edmund Hashim) and Ira (Tony Curtis) driving through the Gila River Pima Indian Reservation in *The Outsider* (Universal, 1961).

The Ira Hayes of Eastwood's film contrasts with Mann's Ira Hayes on two levels. The first concerns Ira's hero image. Mann's film positions Ira as a rebel hero who falls as Icarus, whereas Eastwood's Hayes refuses to acknowledge his own heroism and is emotionally burdened by the loss of his friends. The second difference concerns race. Burt Cardullo writes that the fate of Curtis's Hayes centers on "bad luck at not being born Caucasian" (Cardullo, 2010, 53). *The Outsider's* Hayes is portrayed by a Jewish-American actor of Hungarian descent. Curtis plays Ira as a man determined to contest the image of the savage Indian, proving that the Indian has equal status in American society alongside the white man. The Ira Hayes of *Flags of Our Fathers*, portrayed by Adam Beach (a Saulteaux Indian of Alberta), by contrast, finds himself a victim of negative stereotypes and is haunted by memories of his lost comrades.

Mann's film contributed to a mythology surrounding Ira Hayes, one which Eastwood's film would both acknowledge and critique in order to feed into a larger

examination of the American hero mythology. The most salient feature of this mythology is the song *The Ballad of Ira Hayes*, written by Peter LaFarge (an Algonquin and Korean War veteran) in response to Mann's film and made famous through Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, and Kris Kristofferson's cover versions. The song first appeared on LaFarge's album *As Long as the Grass Will Grow* (1963), a collection of protest songs regarding the treatment of the American Indian, which LaFarge subsequently introduced to Johnny Cash. The lyrics position Hayes's heroism around the notion that he was a figure to be contained by both American and Pima society; he is a "brave young Indian" that we "should remember well", but after the war he "started drinking hard" and "jail was often his home". LaFarge's Hayes (and Mann's) is one whom we should remember as a hero, as society had turned its back on him ("they'd let him raise the flag and lower it like you throw a dog a bone").<sup>7</sup>

Andrew J. Bacevich writes that the mythology of war in post-9/11 America is presented as a "seamless historical narrative...with Operation Iraqi Freedom as a sequel to Operation Overlord" (Bacevich, 2005, 98). Eastwood's film appears to entertain this idea in order to criticize an industry of myth-making, present during World War II and resurrected after 9/11. "Americans seem to concoct stories to make [the truths about war] more palatable", argues Bacevich, and the characters of *Flags of Our Fathers* contest these 'stories' with stories of their own (Bacevich, 2005, 97). A scene near the end of *Flags of Our Fathers*' first act reveals Hayes's attitude towards the hero myth, as well as Eastwood's post-9/11 critique. When fellow flag-raiser René Gagnon informs Ira that they were both in Rosenthal's photograph, Ira threatens him with a bayonet (Fig. 4.13). "I wasn't there", he screams. In the following scene, Gagnon returns to the Marine base at Enewetak Atoll, where the



superior officer who greets him informs him, “If I’m going to give up my seat to a hero then you had better have a good goddamn story to tell”. Gagnon replies, “No, sir”, to which the superior responds: “Enjoy it because they’ll forget about you before Christmas”. These two scenes suggest a counter-argument to the post-9/11 hero myth. Eastwood explained this in his BFI interview in support of the film: “Growing up, I tried to think who’s heroic, and with the war there was Patton, Eisenhower...literally a handful...of names....Now you have to decipher everything: everyone’s a star”. Ira’s ‘heroism’ in Eastwood’s film contrasts with *The Outsider* and the ensuing mythology of Ira Hayes on the grounds that Eastwood acknowledges that the hero has become a social construct. *Flags of Our Fathers*, by contrast, engages with an earlier view of heroism, the “reluctant hero” from the work of mythologist Joseph Campbell, in which the hero “does not want to take on the burdens of the world” (Segal, 2000, 168).



Fig. 4.13. Ira Hayes threatening Rene Gagnon, and denying that he was in Rosenthal’s photograph.

The third act of *Flags of Our Fathers* features a scene in which Ira, retired from military life, digs a drainage ditch with his fellow Pima (Fig. 4.14). The sequence is introduced by James Bradley’s narration: “But life had other plans for him”. As he is digging, Ira is approached by a vacationing family passing through the area and asked

by the father if he would pose for a picture with the wife and children. “You’re him, aren’t you? You’re the hero, right?” the father asks. Ira merely smiles and produces a miniature flag and then poses for the picture. As the family leaves, the father tells his children, “That’s a hero, kids”. This scene punctuates Eastwood’s critique of socially constructed hero myths, as Ira, despite being recognized as “the hero”, will be defined for the rest of his life by a single photograph (Burgoyne, 2010, 173).



Fig. 4.14. “You’re the hero, right?” Ira Hayes, while working on the Pima Reservation, as asked for a photograph in *Flags of Our Fathers*.

Racial identity figures in both Eastwood’s story of Ira Hayes and the mythology of Ira Hayes himself. Eastwood uses Ira Hayes’s Native American experience, however, in order to critique both liberal and conservative interpretations of American exceptionalism. *Flags of Our Fathers* acknowledges the racist treatment that Ira Hayes endured at the hands of a society that had propped him up as a hero. He is called “redskin” by his fellow soldiers, he is refused service at a bar (Fig. 4.15), and politicians patronize him through butchered attempts at his native tongue. Eastwood’s film, however, does not aim to provide any commentary on the history of minorities during and after the war, as the character of Doc Johnson does in *Hamburger Hill* (the African American Vietnam and post-Vietnam experience). In fact, Eastwood

diminishes the idea of individual histories constituting a broader American history, instead engaging with a shared history forming a collective identity, suggesting a counter-argument to the liberal stance on American exceptionalism exemplified by earlier war films. In a scene in the film's third act, Ira addresses the National Congress of American Indians after the war, stating: "Because of war, white men will understand Indians a lot better. And it's going to be a better world". His statement draws resounding applause from a diverse audience of Native Americans, but Ira's eyes are empty of expression, as if these words are empty as well.



Fig. 4.15. *Flags of Our Fathers*: a heavily intoxicated Ira Hayes (right) fights the police after being refused service at a bar; Doc Bradley (center) intervenes; between the two is a painting of Rosenthal's photograph.

The mythology of Ira Hayes with which Eastwood and writers Paul Haggis and William Broyles Jr. contended clearly centers on racial identity; the *Ballad of Ira Hayes* itself acts as a testimony to the Native American experience. In Mann's film, racism is one of the central sources of tension, superseding even the horrors of combat. Before revealing that he has enlisted, Tony Curtis's Hayes speaks with his paternal figure, "Uncle" (Ralph Moody), over dinner (Fig. 4.16). Uncle warns Ira that the Indians who enlist are "following the white man onto the field of shame" and reminds Ira of the "history of our betrayals". Later, while in military training, Ira is

insulted by the drill instructor: “How many scalps do you have in your pocket?” Ira responds: “None, sir. I’m a Pima Indian. We don’t do that, sir”. These moments contribute to the key feature of the Ira Hayes mythology concurrent with the era of its creation, heroism is taking a stand against both the enemies of your society and your own society when you feel it is in the wrong.



Fig. 4.16. “Uncle” (Ralph Moody) confronts Ira Hayes (Tony Curtis) on the legacy of ‘betrayal’.

Cultural memory, according to Marita Sturken, is different than personal memory and history in that it is “memory that is shared outside the avenues of formal discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning” (Sturken 1997, 3). Eastwood contends with the cultural memory of Iwo Jima, and World War II era notions of heroism, through his use of Bakhtin’s notion of double-voicing; from a post-9/11 vantage point, he evokes the forms of pre-9/11 World War II representation and the remembrance of “the Greatest Generation” in order to challenge cultural memory, embodied in Rosenthal’s photograph, with arguments put forward in the post-9/11 American exceptionalism debate. *Flags of Our Fathers* engages with a cultural memory of World War II provided by films ranging from the World War II

era combat films to Steven Spielberg's seminal film *Saving Private Ryan*. The storming of the beach at Iwo Jima in *Flags of Our Fathers* (and the combat scenes that follow) recalls the combat sequences in Spielberg's film: desaturated colors, a montage of varying camera speeds, and sudden and graphic violence. Notions of heroism present in earlier World War II combat films, and Spielberg's film, are also addressed and critiqued. *Flags of Our Fathers*, through these visual codes and through the story of Ira Hayes, engages with generational memory, cultural memory, and genre memory; the double-voicing in Eastwood's film is used for the purpose of bridging earlier ideas of war and national identities through the voice of a post-9/11 America attempting to reconfigure its own ideas of American exceptionalism, in the wake of war abroad and an increased diversity at home that far exceeds that of both the World War II and Vietnam eras.

#### Myths without heroes



Fig. 4.17. Ira Hayes, locking eyes with Abraham Lincoln, before meeting with President Harry Truman in *Flags of Our Fathers*.

In his study of American exceptionalism after 9/11, Anatol Lieven figures Clint Eastwood into the discussion. Lieven observes that Clint Eastwood is a patriotic film

hero who has a history of voicing “intelligent” and “ironic” commentary on white society through minority characters: “Coming from directors and actors whom the South and the Heartland have revered, this approach probably had more effect than the more overt anti-racism of directors such as Norman Jewison or Denzel Washington” (Lieven, 2005, 46). Just like *The Deer Hunter*, Eastwood’s distinctly post-Vietnam Western *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (Warner Brothers, 1976) can be seen as “an attempt to heal the war’s wounds by merging Hollywood western traditions with new cultural and social attitudes to create a more human, open, and multicultural mythology” (Lieven, 2005, 59). Both Lieven and Eastwood appear to endorse the idea that even harsh critiques of American exceptionalism and contestations with national mythology cannot do without some reconsideration of national myths.

Vietnam War films, such as *Hamburger Hill*, voice a different perspective on the mythology surrounding national unity. In his reflections on the American Civil War and the Reconstruction period, Frederick Douglass stated: “In all relations of life and death, we are met by the colour line” (Douglass, 1883). In that speech Douglass criticized what he characterized as “the colored people...keeping up the color line”; those who submit to “fear of making their color visible”, he argued, are “themselves scarcely worthy of even theoretical freedom” (Douglass, 1883). In addition to the African American cinema of the late 1980s and early 1990s, by making colour visible *Hamburger Hill* offers a rejoinder to Douglass. The story of Doc Johnson serves to inform the viewer of a Vietnam experience different to that of Willard (*Apocalypse Now*), Chris Taylor (*Platoon*), or Mike Vronsky (*The Deer Hunter*)—an experience marked by the same marginalization experienced at home. The existence of varied war histories, in the view of John Irvin and Spike Lee, necessitates a dialogue with, or a response to, Douglass’s challenge. *Flags of Our Fathers* does not enter into

dialogue with Douglass, nor does it provide a counter-argument. Instead, Eastwood's film examines both the space in which Douglass's argument plays out, the formation of national identity and the forging of American mythology, and offers a new framework with which to address Douglass, one which presents a crystallized national identity coupled with skepticism towards myth-making.

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Though not discussed in this thesis, *Miracle at St. Anna* nevertheless serves as an interesting text for further discussion on the points raised in my research: the debate over American exceptionalism is foregrounded heavily in the story, and elements of battlefield haunting evoked through the uncanny (to be discussed in chapter five) are present in Lee's film.

<sup>2</sup> The notion of American exceptionalism has its origins in Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835), an investigation into why the United States of America, and not European nations (in particular de Tocqueville's own France), was able to sustain a relatively stable democracy after a popular revolution.

<sup>3</sup> The rest of the interview can be found at *IndieLondon*: <http://www.indielondon.co.uk/Film-Review/flags-of-our-fathers-clint-eastwood-interview>

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that Renan wrote "What is a nation?/*Ou'est-ce qu'une nation?*" ten years after the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871), at a time when the concept of nationhood was just emerging. In this essay, Renan notes that "nations...are something new in history" and what characterizes them is "the fusion of populations that compose them."

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that no information could be found regarding Abraham Johnson, and he, though depicted as being killed in the battle for Hamburger Hill, is not listed on the black wall of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C.

<sup>6</sup> *Flags of Our Fathers*' companion piece, *Letters from Iwo Jima* (Dreamworks, 2006), also directed by Eastwood, offers interesting insights into how post-911 war cinema addresses issues of national identity by demystifying nationalism and patriotism, in ways that are both similar and different than *Flags of Our Fathers*. For further reading on *Letters from Iwo Jima*, see Robert Burgoyne's "Generational Memory and Affect in *Letters From Iwo Jima*" (currently unpublished, available online), in which Burgoyne highlights how Eastwood's film engages with cultural memory to critique notions of nationalism and patriotism. Burgoyne's chapter "Haunting in the War Films: *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*," found in *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History* (Minnesota: U of Minnesota P, 2010 edition), also discusses the trope of battlefield haunting present in these films, an issue that I discuss at greater length in chapter five.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to Mann and Eastwood's films (and the real Ira Hayes's appearance in *Sands of Iwo Jima*), Ira Hayes was also played by Lee Marvin in the made-for-television film *The American* (1960), as part of the *Sunday Showcase* series.



## Chapter Five

### **“Things that almost killed me”: Trauma, the uncanny, and subjective vision in *Apocalypse Now* and *The Hurt Locker***



Fig. 5.1. Sergeant Lenearo Ashford using the “Virtual Iraq” program at the U.S. Department of Defense in Washington, D.C.

In 2008, the United States military implemented a therapeutic virtual reality video game, developed at the University of Southern California, called *Virtual Iraq*, a simulation program used to treat Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans suffering from PTSD, a condition documented in nearly 20% of returning veterans at the time of the study.<sup>1</sup> The program was modeled on the landscapes and gameplay of popular war video games, such as *America’s Army* and the *Call of Duty* series, but rather than presenting a subjective panoramic vision of the battlefield, a feature which made these games popular, *Virtual Iraq* provides the player with optical illusions and a series of randomly generated images and scenarios which are tailored to the specific case history of the patient. The participant dons 3D glasses and headphones and is



transported to Iraq by the therapist to confront specific elements of the Iraq War experience in order to master his traumatic experience.

The experience *Virtual Iraq* highlights has a distinct presence in both Iraq War films and Vietnam War films, where the condition of the traumatized soldier is discernible as a narrative device. This is expressed in numerous scenes that detail the imprinting of war on the human psyche, scenes that convey the hallucinatory and subjective experience of war through a variety of visual strategies. Two films that are especially significant in this regard are Francis Ford Coppola's Vietnam War film *Apocalypse Now* (United Artists, 1979) and Kathryn Bigelow's Iraq War film *The Hurt Locker* (Lions Gate, 2009). Both films render this remapping of the human psyche through expressive visual design. Each, however, employs a distinct mode of subjective representation that can be linked to specific thematic concerns.

"The Vietnam War", according to William Hagen, "was an intimate, loosely framed, on-the-run *cinéma vérité* experience", and a similar point could be made about the Iraq War. Representations of both wars can be seen as a competition of "war narrators", challenging the mainstream media's account of the war in more viscerally compelling ways (Hagen, 1983, 230). Both *Apocalypse Now* and *The Hurt Locker* broach audience expectations of war already shaped by documentary films, photo journalism, embedded print and television journalism, and (in the case of the Iraq War) Internet videos. Such media set the stage for Coppola and Bigelow to craft their films in a style that de-familiarized the war landscape viewers were accustomed to. At the time of *Apocalypse Now*'s production, "any film about Vietnam that followed the traditions of realistic narrative filmmaking (especially of war films) would be working against a collective sensibility that had arrived at different preconceptions of what

was authentic”, and as similar preconceptions about the Iraq War experience became evident, *The Hurt Locker* followed the same rhetorical project as *Apocalypse Now* (Hagen, 1983, 231). The styles of both films are intended to encourage the progression away from previous memories of the war experience and towards deeper moral and philosophical debates.

Although Coppola’s and Bigelow’s film employ different visual styles, the intentions of their authors are similar. In this chapter, I will show how *The Hurt Locker* borrows the narrative structure and the trope of battlefield haunting from *Apocalypse Now* in order to provide a critique on the way that war rewrites the human psyche. Battlefield haunting in *The Hurt Locker* and *Apocalypse Now* is expressed through uncanny repetition and a constant return to the scene of trauma through an episodic narrative structure. I will also show how both films render the traumatic, interior space of battle through the rewriting of war film genre codes. Both films incorporate the influence of pre-cinematic spectacle forms into their visual languages. *Apocalypse Now* radically departs from the influence of the panorama painting, a form with a strong presence in earlier war films, instead using phantasmagorical imagery of a haunted battle zone. By contrast, *The Hurt Locker* translates the new logistics of perception to the traditional panoramic vision of the battlefield, and in doing so offers a new visual mode, the moving panorama war film.



Fig. 5.2. "Pickett's Charge", depicted in Paul Philippoteaux's panoramic *Gettysburg Cyclorama* (1883), Gettysburg National Military Park, Pennsylvania.



Fig. 5.3. Antonio Gattorno's *Hitler's Portrait* (1942), a phantasmagorical interpretation of war-torn Europe.

Geoff King characterized *Apocalypse Now* as a spectacle of “authenticity” and “artistic imagination” (King, 2006, 288). The key word here is *spectacle*, as war representations have been a form of spectacle since early cinema—as evidenced by the marketing of D. W. Griffith’s American Civil War film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)—and in pre-cinema art as well. One such pre-cinema spectacle was the panorama, an attraction that attempted to transport the viewer into the thick of battle. Panoramic war depictions invited the eye to navigate the equally focused foreground and background action, an experience which attempted to mimic actual combat participation and one which war films would attempt to recreate (Fig. 5.2). Sweeping wide shots of Omaha Beach in *Saving Private Ryan* (Dreamworks, 1998) and *The Longest Day* (Twentieth Century, 1962) and trench warfare in *Paths of Glory* (United Artists, 1957) are but a few examples that exhibit the influence of the panorama on war cinema.

*Apocalypse Now*, however, radically departs from panoramic vision and instead draws upon another pre-cinema spectacle art form: phantasmagoria, the use of optical illusions and juxtaposition of images to produce a distinctly haunting rendering of time, space, and events. Developed in Paris during the late eighteenth century, phantasmagoria was a spectacle form in which a lantern, placed behind a screen and mounted with a shutter containing painted slides, projected ghostly images upon the screen (Christie, 1994, 111). The lantern-projector would often be mounted on rails behind the screen, so that these images appeared to move about the screen, perceived by the audience as revenants (Burgoyne, 2010, 3). This form appears to have influenced subsequent movements in art, and war has often found itself to be the subject of these paintings, in particular those of the surrealists—Dalí, Gattorno, and

others (Fig. 5.3). But the aim of phantasmagoria is not authentic recreation but rather to suggest something ghostly, or unearthly, about the subject represented. By invoking this form, Coppola's film transports the Vietnam War itself to a haunted realm at the dark side of human nature. This is achieved through editor Walter Murch's use of double exposure and partial dissolves, and through cinematographer Vittorio Storaro's use of color.

By contrast, *The Hurt Locker* presents a new approach to the panoramic war vision, one which presents the battlefield through a 360-degree view from a series of identifiable and unidentifiable spectators; *The Hurt Locker* is what I will call a "moving panorama" war film, one in which the panoramic vision of battle is all encompassing and unrestrained. I am using the term "moving panorama" to signify a particular type of panoramic vision—one in which the viewer is surrounded on all sides by a 360-degree panorama field, and experiences the event depicted as a montage of different perspectives. This experience not only exceeds the verisimilitude promised by the traditional panorama, but also offers the illusion of being transported into the event. Like the *Virtual Iraq* video game, the war experience of *The Hurt Locker* re-enacts a particular form of battlefield experience through this style, providing a new visual language for war. Beginning with the immediacy of observation-based material, Bigelow "experientializes" the rendering of war in a way that is "raw, immediate, and visceral" (Thompson, 2009). Starting from a *cinéma vérité* approach reminiscent of Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (Warner Brothers, 1987), *The Hurt Locker* creates a montage of multiple perspectives—achieved through multiple cameras, varying film stock and camera speed, inconsistent angling, et cetera—in order to mimic the manner in which the human brain records traumatic battlefield events.

Cinema is a force that gives war meaning

*I can remember the strange feelings I had when I was a kid looking at war photographs in Life....Even when the picture was sharp and cleanly defined, something wasn't clear at all, something repressed that monitored the images and withheld their essential information. – Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (1977)*

*The advent of photography and film did little to alter the incentive to boost morale, for the lie in war is almost always the lie of omission....Only when the myth is punctured, as it eventually was in Vietnam, does the press begin to report in a sensory rather than mythic manner. But even then it is reacting to a public that has changed its perception of war. – Chris Hedges, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (2002)*

In a 2010 interview for CNN, *Apocalypse Now* screenwriter John Milius was asked if he would “like to compare *Apocalypse Now* to *The Hurt Locker*”, to which he responded: “They’re very different. But...they don’t really make any commentary on the war itself....The film is an examination of what people do within that experience”.<sup>2</sup> This has been a repeated characterization of Bigelow’s film, that it presents an apolitical or non-partisan view of the Iraq War, a claim which has been contested on the ground that any treatment of the Iraq War is inherently political in nature.<sup>3</sup> This characterization mirrors, in many respects, Coppola’s description of *Apocalypse Now* when the film was previewed at the Cannes Film Festival months before its official release: “My film is not a movie; it’s not about Vietnam. It is Vietnam”.

Both films present characters on downward spirals, a narrative thread which is informed by the effects of PTSD. *Apocalypse Now* and *The Hurt Locker*, however, do not derive their approach to war trauma from a shared use of traditional fiction genre formulas. *Apocalypse Now*, according to John Hellmann, analyses the Vietnam War through “the specific ethos, imagery, and pattern of the hard-boiled detective formula” (Hellmann, 1982, 429). The style of Willard’s voice-over narration echoes that of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett’s characters; Veronica Geng observes, “Willard talks in easy ironies, the sin city similes, the wary, laconic, why-am-I-even-bothering-to-tell-you language of the pulp private eye” (Geng, 1979, 70). The symbolic use of ceiling fans and venetian blinds in Coppola’s film is a borrowed trope as well. Even Willard’s descent into the ‘heart of darkness’ resembles the quest of the film-noir anti-hero. In Willard’s story, an actual jungle replaces the concrete one.

*The Hurt Locker*, however, is not structured around traditional genres or American mythology. Rather, Bigelow’s film is influenced by war photography and documentaries.<sup>4</sup> It maintains the connection with the documentary style—in particular, *PBS Frontline*, *BBC Panorama*, and the work of Nick Broomfield, whose films were shot by Barry Ackroyd, the cinematographer on *The Hurt Locker*. The shaky-camera, *cinéma vérité* approach to *The Hurt Locker* is to create a more familiar and believable battlefield milieu, a space where the viewer can readily grasp the war trauma taking hold of the characters. *The Hurt Locker*, in this regard, is able to contend with Garrett Stewart’s notion of “digital fatigue” (discussed in chapter two), as it is a film that appears to maintain a clear narrative through its structure and human agency is not overwhelmed by the visual style.<sup>5</sup>

In *Apocalypse Now* and *The Hurt Locker*, war trauma is not conveyed simply through visual aesthetics. It is evoked through the episodic structure that both films utilize. *The Hurt Locker*, according to Douglas A. Cunningham, employs a fragmented, modernist structure that resembles “something of a cinematic collection of serialized war-correspondent dispatches, each of which resolves the most pressing problem at hand while offering up small details of character development that contribute to a larger—if subtler—vision of psycho-emotional collapse” (Cunningham, 2010). Both *The Hurt Locker* and *Apocalypse Now*, Cunningham writes, contain a “deliberately uneven push of [the] narrative’s individual episodes...[which] progress towards a tangible climax...while the true development...takes the powerful form of commentary...on the shattered nature of the individual war experience” (ibid.). In *Apocalypse Now*, the uneven push is underscored through what Coppola calls “matching upwards”—adding details to successive scenes without too much concern as to whether these details match those in previous scenes (e.g., the sudden, unexplained appearance of a bandage on Willard’s cheek just before the tiger sequence, and the disappearance of the puppy recovered from the Sampan massacre scene) (Coppola, 2001). The progressive episodes in *Apocalypse Now*, experienced by PBR street gang during their journey up the river towards Kurtz, feel slightly jarring when examined against the main narrative thread (the quest to find and terminate Kurtz) and thus speak to the psychological degradation experienced by the characters.

In an interview for the *Writer’s Guild of America*, Mark Boal commented that *The Hurt Locker* is not the first war film to use an episodic approach: “*Apocalypse Now* is told in chapters...and war is like that in that it does not have a neat little through line....[*The Hurt Locker*’s] structure came about in an attempt to be faithful to the



reality of the situation” (Faye, 2011). I contend that both films rely on the psychological deterioration of their central characters as the connective tissue for their episodic structures. I will use this reading of *Apocalypse Now* and *The Hurt Locker* to illuminate how both films engage with the notion of battlefield haunting—ghosts haunting the present as an indication of war’s “unfinished business” (Bronfen 2012, 30).

At the time of *Apocalypse Now*’s release, the term ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ had only recently been coined. The term ‘post-Vietnam syndrome’ was more commonly used to describe symptoms akin to ‘battle fatigue’ (World War II), ‘shell shock’ (World War I), or ‘soldier’s heart’ (the American Civil War), and, over a decade later, the term ‘Gulf War syndrome’ would be added to the lexicon. The opening of Coppola’s film immediately alerts the audience to the role of trauma and emotional battle wounds in the film’s narrative by suggesting, through the use of visual and audio dissolves and juxtapositions, that not only Willard but America itself is haunted by the ghosts of the Vietnam War. A jungle set ablaze by napalm partially fades to an upside-down image of Willard giving what *Life Magazine*’s World War II artist and correspondent Tom Lea coined the “the two-thousand-yard-stare” (Figs. 5.4 and 5.5) (Lea, 1945)—an extension of Sophocles’ term “one-thousand-yard-stare” (specifically from *Ajax* and *Philocetes*) later used in Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> A cigarette with a long, cylindrical ash dangles from his mouth and fingers, an empty bottle of brandy sits on his nightstand, along with a suspicious-looking spoon, and a pistol lies beside him on the bed sheets. In this sequence, Willard is doing what he will continue to do throughout the film—constantly return to what appears to be war trauma—but the ambiguous temporality of the sequence calls into question exactly what the traumatic event was.<sup>7</sup> Is Willard recalling traumatic events that occurred prior to the film’s

central events, placing this sequence as the true beginning of the film's chronology? Does this sequence take place at the end of the film—Willard reliving the mission to kill Kurtz—as the images of flying helicopters from the napalm scene and shots of Kurtz's compound ablaze would suggest? Perhaps this sequence bears no relation to the narrative and rather acts alone as a visual essay on America's memory of Vietnam? In any case, Coppola never reveals what event is being remembered, but this sequence exemplifies the strength of one of the film's prominent motifs: war trauma elevated to the status of ghostly manifestations, haunting American mythology and national narratives.

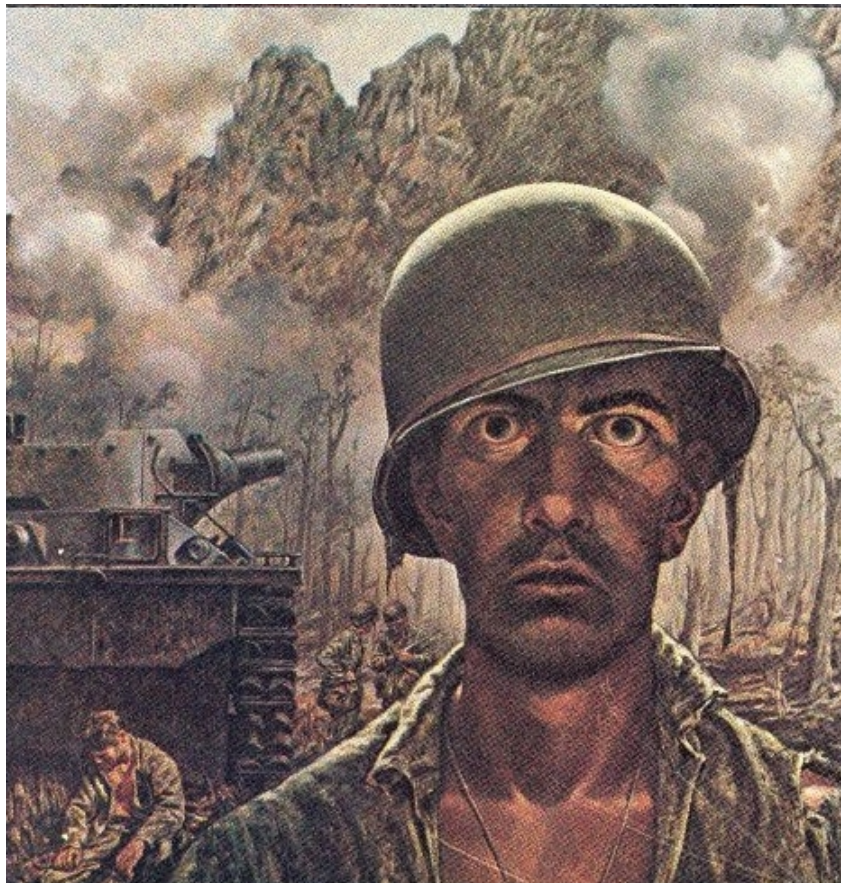


Fig. 5.4. Tom Lea's two-thousand-yard-stare, appearing in *Life Magazine*, June 1945.

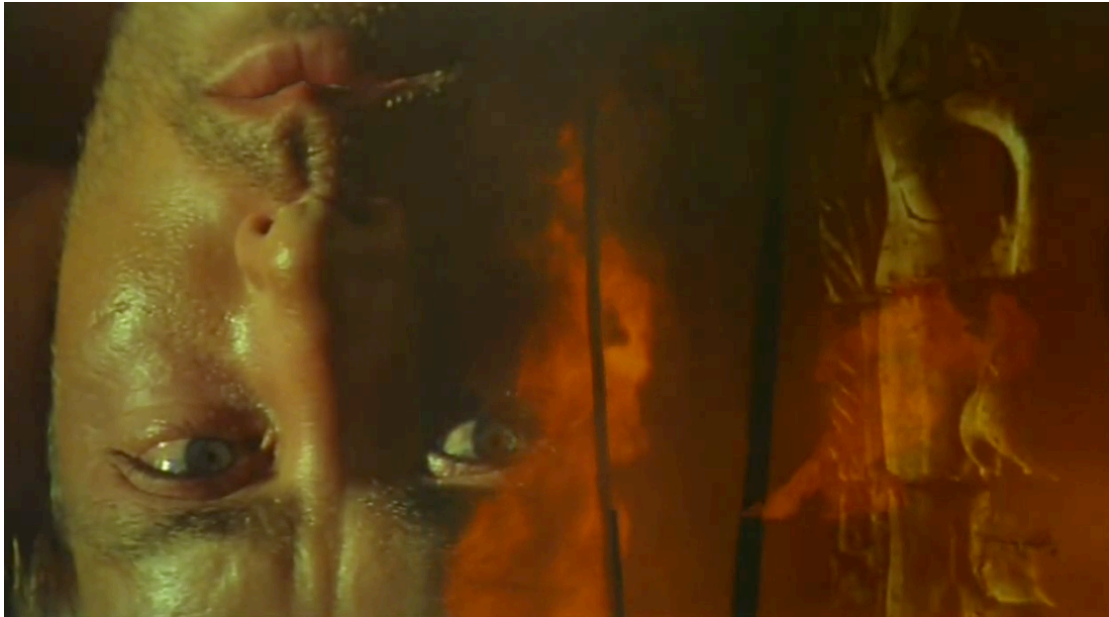


Fig. 5.5 Willard's two-thousand-yard-stare in *Apocalypse Now* (United Artists, 1979).

As the film progresses into its quest phase, the journey to find Colonel Kurtz, Willard's relationship with the crew of the "PBR Street Gang" exemplifies the cold distance with which trauma has left him and possibly hints that, should these "rock-n-rollers with one foot in their grave" survive, they will realize the same. Willard's voice-over introduces these characters. Chef (Frederic Forrest) is "wrapped too tight for Vietnam", Lance (Sam Bottoms) probably "never fired a weapon in his life", Mr. Clean (Lawrence Fishburne) hails from "some South Bronx shithole" with Vietnam putting the "zap on his head", and, despite it being Willard's mission, it "sure as shit" was The Chief's (Albert Hall) boat. Willard tells them nothing of himself or the mission and engages in minimal interaction. During a search for mangos in the jungle with Chef, Willard, sighing and resting his weary head against his rifle, barely engages with Chef's recounting of his past as a *saucier* in New Orleans ("What's a *saucier*?"; "Oh, and how's that?"). The cold emotional distance, revealed mostly in Willard's eyes (the two-thousand-yard-stare continuing throughout the film), is not limited to the PBR crew: as Willard and the PBR Street Gang enjoy beer and steaks with Colonel Kilgore's (Robert Duvall) air cavalry battalion on the night before the

famous “Ride of the Valkyrie” sequence, Willard sits, several empty beer cans by his side, aloof from the other soldiers, who crowd around their guitar-playing cavalry commander, reminiscent of the reverence Confederate cavalymen had for leaders such as J. E. B. Stuart or Nathan Bedford Forrest. This spatial and emotional distance between Willard and the other characters not only allows for the narrative flow to be informed by Willard’s war trauma, but also establishes an increasingly pronounced identification and psychological doubling between Willard and Kurtz—Coppola and John Milius’s primary narrative strategy.

Willard’s memories also shape the narrative structure through using genre formulas to de-familiarize both the story and visual form. In addition to borrowing tropes from the hard-boiled detective story and applying surrealist visual strokes, *Apocalypse Now* is in dialogue with the Gothic horror genre in its invocation of Sigmund Freud’s *The Uncanny*. The uncanny clearly appears in the film through an increase of the unfamiliar, evoking feelings of dread, as Willard draws closer to Kurtz. An interesting example can be found in a deleted scene from the original John Milius script, titled “the monkey sampan scene”, which takes place just before the death of The Chief (Fig. 5.6). In this scene, the PBR Street Gang encounters an abandoned sampan, overrun by monkeys, floating downriver from Kurtz’s compound. As the sampan passes, the sail whips around to reveal the nude body of one of Kurtz’s Montagnards. Despite appearing neither in the theatrical nor the *Redux* version of the film, the scene represents a pinnacle of de-familiarization, building on the sense of dread which is present in both versions of the film; the psychedelic Do Long Bridge sequence, with flares, soldiers jumping into the water with not army rucksacks but suitcases (“take me home”), blaring tuba notes, and Lance on LSD—Lance prancing around the PBR with a purple-smoke grenade just moments before Mr. Clean’s death from gunfire

which seems to materialize from the jungle as though by magic, the French colonialists appearing out of the fog like ghosts (in the *Redux* version), the shoreline decorated with corpses (“He was close. He was real close. I couldn’t see him yet, but I could feel him”), and the arrow and spear attack by a hooting Montagnard mob, resulting in the death of The Chief—are uncanny moments intended to disrupt any realist conception of the Vietnam experience; these are not images from *Life Magazine* or an Emile de Antonio documentary. The war ghosts that plague Willard are compounded through these moments, as they are unfamiliar even to him. Elizabeth Bronfen writes of this kind of haunting: it “feeds into and sustains the notion that war is an unfinished business” (Bronfen, 2011, 10); Coppola takes the viewer to the site where the Vietnam ghosts which plague American cultural memory emerge, “relentlessly haunting the present” (Bronfen, 2011, 10).

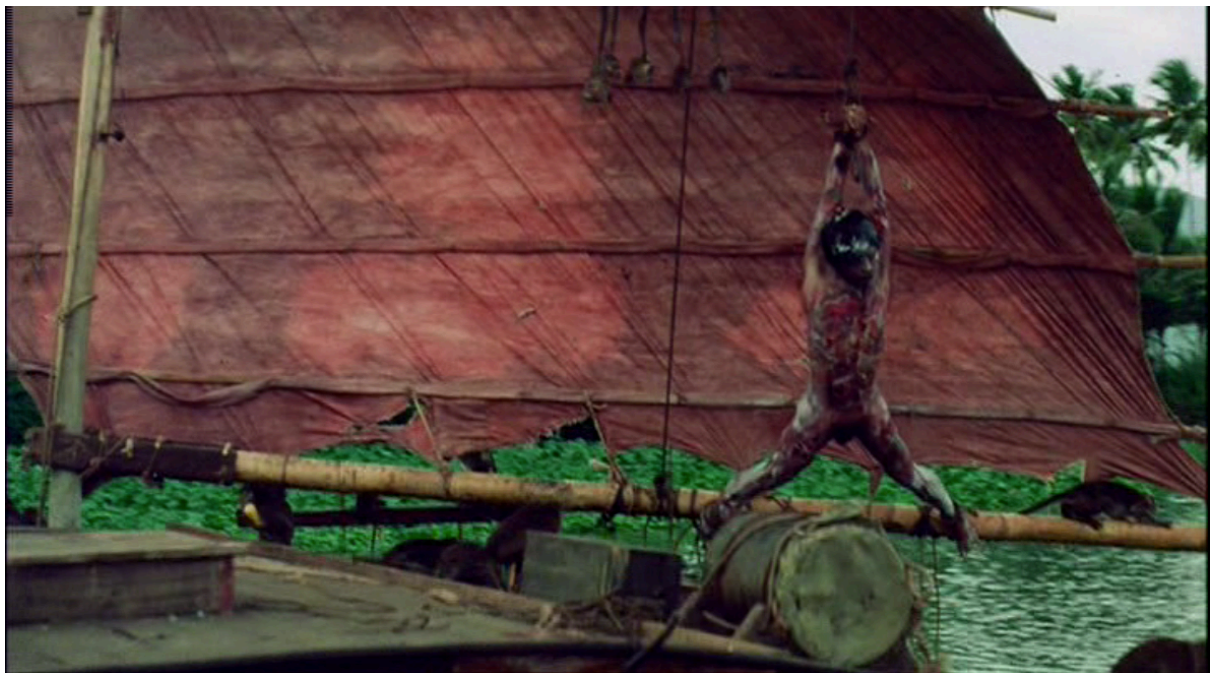


Fig. 5.6. “The monkey sampan scene” is an example of the uncanny in *Apocalypse Now* (United Artists, 1979).

In *The Hurt Locker*, the uncanny is presented as a constant, psychological return to the opening scene of the film, even by characters not involved in the scene. This scene



establishes the elements of the uncanny present in the film through conversation with Freud's view of "the dominance in the unconscious mind of a 'compulsion to repeat'...a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle" (Smith, 2000, 3690–3691). The film opens with the death of Staff Sergeant Thompson (Guy Pierce) by an IED (Fig. 5.7). In conventional Hollywood screenwriting, this sequence would be considered part of the plant and payoff technique—grim foreshadowing—but screenwriter Mark Boal, formerly an embedded journalist in Iraq, uses this scene as a nightmare which slowly takes hold of its characters; if we accept the writer, director, and production team's characterization of the film as having a documentary approach, then this sequence contributes to the film as a meta-documentary: one where human, emotional depth, generally lacking in documentary films or in *cinéma vérité*, is restored to expand the narrative capacities without undermining verisimilitude. The central motif of the 'hurt locker', which serves as both the title and suggests an ambiguous theme in the film itself, may be considered key to understanding the film's traumatic, psychological subject.



Fig. 5.7. The death of Staff Sergeant Thompson (Guy Pierce) in Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* (Lion's Gate, 2009).

The definition of the term ‘hurt locker’ is left unclear. The term itself is military slang for a state of severe physical or emotional pain and anxiety, particularly after a dangerous encounter, but it remains an elusive concept, open to redefinition by the viewer. An alternative definition can be found in the two boxes, or lockers, shown in the film, ones that connect characters to the opening scene. The first is a flag-draped white box containing the personal effects of Thompson. Sergeant J. T. Sanborn (Anthony Mackie) observes as Thompson’s helmet and dog tags are placed in the ‘locker’ next to a folded flag. For Sanborn, the closing of Thompson’s ‘hurt locker’ does not bring closure after he has witnessed Thompson’s death in the opening scene. Rather, this ritual elevates Thompson’s demise to the level of haunting, a ghost present in missions Sanborn will embark on throughout the remainder of the film. The ghostly haunting of Thompson’s death is present in the *mise-en-scène* of the bomb-disposal sequences, a topic to which I will return. The second locker is one that James keeps under his bunk, a treasure chest of ‘trophy’ from previous missions (detonators and wires), a box which James describes as being “full of things that almost killed me”. James is not haunted by the ghost of Thompson but rather by his own memories; the artifacts contained in James’s ‘hurt locker’ are reminders of his brushes with death on many occasions, a personal haunting in the making.

If we examine the *mise-en-scène* of the post-Thompson bomb-disposal scenes, we can locate many examples of repetitions that evoke a sense of traumatic haunting. Rubbish, aluminum cans, cardboard boxes, and plastic bags litter the streets (could they be concealing an IED?), providing a labyrinthine maze for the main characters to navigate and reminding us of the pile of garbage that concealed the IED that killed Thompson. A car driven by a possible insurgent, who engages in a stare-down with James, has green grass on the dashboard, recalling a conversation between Sanborn

and Specialist Owen Eldridge (Brian Geraghty) during Thompson's death sequence (Eldridge: "What this place really needs is grass. We can start our own grass business....Sanborn and Sons"). The Pepsi logo is seen on a discarded soda can during Thompson's death and can also be found in the background of James's first bomb-disposal scene. Iraqi civilians flee from the site where a bomb was discovered in Thompson's death scene and in one of James's scenes, human traffic slowing down the explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) response and raising the tension. Most importantly, the composition and camera movements are consistent throughout all the bomb-disposal sequences: tracks, pans, tilts, and zooms occur at multiple angles and differing speeds without being connected through a discernable logic. The cinematography, along with the multi-dimensional sound mix, contributes to the film as a moving panorama, a concept which I will discuss later, and to the uncanny repetition of occurrences and details surrounding Thompson's death.

One critical example of traumatic repetition is found in the sequence in which military psychologist Lieutenant Colonel John Cambridge (Christian Camargo) visits a still recovering Eldridge. Eldridge is playing a warfare video game, possibly as part of his therapy, and stops to speak to Cambridge, dismissing the doctor's credibility by saying, "Hey, it's Mr 'be all you can be'". When Cambridge asks what he is thinking, Eldridge picks up his unloaded rifle, points it downward, and says, "Here's Thompson. He's dead". He then pulls the trigger and says, "He's alive". He repeats this twice, looking into Cambridge's eyes. Eldridge blames himself for Thompson's death, as he failed to shoot the man responsible for detonating the bomb that killed Thompson. During James's bomb-disposal sequences, Eldridge, still suffering from prior trauma, does not fire upon any potential threats to James's life, setting up a repetition of the original traumatizing event: the death of Thompson and Eldridge's



own sense of guilt. It is only during an encounter with insurgents in the desert that Eldridge, through encouragement from James, is able to kill to save himself and his team.

Sergeant First Class William James: A Willard in the making



Fig. 5.8. Willard sits alone in the dark in *Apocalypse Now* (United Artists, 1979).



Fig. 5.9. William James sits alone in the dark in *The Hurt Locker* (Lions Gate, 2009).

In a sequence halfway through *The Hurt Locker*, William James encounters the biggest challenge yet in the film and possibly in his whole military career: a bomb

placed in the trunk of an abandoned car, the detonation wires connected through the vehicle's underside, through the hood, and into the ignition. After successfully disarming the bomb, he is approached by Colonel Reed (David Morse), who, greatly impressed with James's bravado, asks how many bombs James has disarmed. After initially dodging the question, James owns up, nonchalantly, to having disarmed eight hundred and seventy-six bombs. After this mission, James, though in the relative safety of the barracks, sleeps with his helmet on, as if his combat persona is not restricted to a battlefield. James's experience places him firmly in what Stephen Graham characterizes as the contemporary warfare and military mindset, one in which there is no "battlefield" but a "battlespace": "mobilization is...no longer focused within a delimited geographical or temporal space....[but rather it is] increasingly unbounded in time and space" (Graham, 2011, 3). James may have performed his duty on a so-called battlefield (disposing 876 bombs), but his combat persona is not restricted to a particular time and space, and thus he remains in a "battlespace", another "hurt locker."

*I hardly said a word to my wife until I said "yes" to a divorce. – Willard in Apocalypse Now.*

James can be considered a precursor to Willard, a figure who manifests an early version of the Willard character, though not yet so psychologically damaged. The difference lies with James's attitude towards combat, as he approaches war like a war film. James intentionally raises the stakes in his early mission, as if he is a director creating suspense and increasing the tension within his own war film: using a smoke grenade to shield his actions from his own EOD unit during his first on-screen mission and removing his helmet and body armor during the UN building scene. "It is

the escapism that a theatrical perception of battle affords”, writes Bronfen, “which allows the war film to pass as a movie entertainment in the first place, regardless of how realist it strives to be” (Bronfen, 2011, 186). The character of James expands on Virilio’s observation on the theatrical dimension of war by originating this theatricality on his own terms. As a survival mechanism, and to avoid the psychological deterioration experienced by Sanborn and Eldridge, James casts himself as a character in his own personal war film. Willard, by contrast, does not engage in such role-play, as he has already “seen this movie”.

The visual forms employed by both films seek to engage with the ways that war trauma translates to national trauma. Robert Burgoyne writes that although “sonic and visual realism has been celebrated as the war film’s particular contribution to the history of cinema”, the “cultural trauma that the war films convey goes beyond the frame of even the grimmest forms of verisimilitude” (Burgoyne, 2010, 166). In *Apocalypse Now* and *The Hurt Locker* this cultural trauma is wedded to the images and how they are presented, but the films employ radically different methods of visual presentation, informed by both genre memory and war representation which pre-dates cinema. The visual style of both films is informed by both previous approaches to the war film and the cultural hauntings that these films reflect. These films engage with pre-cinematic war depictions which are organized through what Bronfen characterizes as the “pathos formulas of battle”: war panorama paintings which provide the foundation for cinematic re-imaging of combat “[organize] the visual experience of battle in such a way as to include several vantage points...[and] sustain the illusion that the audience [is] in control of the spectacle, rather than being overwhelmed by the intensity of slaughter on display” (Bronfen, 2011, 193). *The Hurt Locker* contains these multiple vantage points, but presents them through a montage in order to

overwhelm and de-familiarize the audience from any prior conception of the Iraq War. *Apocalypse Now*, by contrast, radically departs from the tradition of the war panorama spectacle, instead relying on a completely different form of pre-cinema art in order to disorient the viewer and to explicitly evoke the cultural haunting of the Vietnam War: the phantasmagoria.

Phantasmagoria and panorama: *Apocalypse Now* and phantasmagoria



Fig. 5.10. Etienne-Gaspard “Robertson” Robert displaying his phantasmagorical spectacle “The Skeleton” in Paris, 1797.



Fig. 5.11. An ‘in-camera’ optical illusion, or phantasmagoria, shot from *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, Columbia Pictures, 1992).

Originating in Europe during the late eighteenth century, the phantasmagoria was a theatrical visual art form which relied on images projected from the magic lantern device over landscape art to suggest ghostly hauntings and to evoke the gothic (Fig. 5.10). This effect was achieved, literally, through smoke and mirrors, but also with the projection of images over paintings of a landscape or people—an optical illusion in which the uncanny clashes with the rational. This is what Tom Gunning describes as “the summoning of phantoms...while displaying the triumphs of the new sciences” (Gunning, 2004, 5). This form was adopted into cinema by the likes of Georges Méliès and the German Expressionists, generating a visual style which Coppola drew upon for *Apocalypse Now* and much of his other work (Fig. 5.11). *Apocalypse Now* can be characterized as a phantasmagorical war film based on its presentation of the battlezone as a place of haunting memories, incoherency, and, most importantly, psychological degradation stemming from PTSD. Coppola himself even characterized the increasing surrealism during the film’s progression as “phantasmagoric imagery”.<sup>8</sup>

This is achieved in two distinct ways: editor Walter Murch's use of dissolves and juxtaposition, and cinematographer Vittorio Storaro's philosophy and use of colour.

Let us use, for example, the image of Willard's two-thousand-yard stare (Fig. 5.5). This shot is established through a partial-dissolve transition, starting with a shot of a burning jungle, then dissolving to a stationary shot of Willard looking upwards, then partially (not completely) dissolving back to the burning jungle so that the juxtaposed shot of Willard is in the foreground, and then bringing the burning jungle shot more into focus and Willard less into focus. The flaming jungle shot is a tracking shot which moves the images of flying helicopters and burning palm trees across Willard's face like an image from phantasmagoria theatre (Christie, 2010). This shot in the opening sequence sets the expectation for the film's thematic content and visual rendering of war. The aim here is to establish a doubling between Willard and Kurtz which Coppola will revisit in the film's closing; Garrett Stewart notes that the film closes "upon its opening image", as if Willard's story is, by phantasmagoria, grafted onto Kurtz's story, both stories underlining the dark side of neo-colonialism (Stewart, 1981, 468). As Willard proceeds upriver to Kurtz's compound, the technique of dissolve and juxtaposition continues with increasing intensity until the film's ending, a scene of Willard leaving Kurtz's compound upon completion of his mission, a shot composition which echoes the phantasmagoria in the opening scene.<sup>9</sup>

In Coppola's film, "a luminous presence is superimposed on a dark past", offering a link between Storaro's use of colour and the presence of phantasmagoria in the film (Storaro, 2001, 270). In a study of chromophobia—fear and anxiety aroused by the use of particular colors—David Batchelor writes: "Figuratively, colour has always meant less-than-true and the not-quite-real" (Batchelor, 2000, 52). Storaro's colors are

designed to achieve precisely this. The use of orange, green, blue, and cloudy off-white colors pierce shadows and darkness to establish onscreen an otherness from the battlezone. The dark-light contrasts contribute to the film's thematic context. One of the few explicit appearances of the colour white occurs when Kurtz's Montagnard guards are revealed: "whitewashed, spectral natives who seem to travesty the pale Anglo villain come among them" (Stewart, 1981, 458). In an interview with *The Guardian*, Storaro cites the illustrations from Burn Hogarth's *Tarzan* as an inspiration for the choice of colors in *Apocalypse Now*: "[Francis and I] didn't want to do anything naturalistic....I didn't want it to look like reportage. I put artificial colour [and] artificial light next to real colour [and] real light—to have the explosion of napalm next to a green palm tree; to have the fire of an explosion next to a sunset in order to represent the conflict between the cultural and the irrational" (Jones, 2003). Storaro additionally characterizes the film's cinematography as representing "a discourse on the senses of civilizations"; the notion that light represents the civilized world and darkness represents the uncivilized (primeval) world is presented through "technological color's abuse of natural colour forms...in cinematic terms, this is the conflict central to the film...it is the way artificial colour violates natural colour" (Storaro, 2001, 280).

### *The Hurt Locker* and the tradition of the moving panorama

By contrast, the visual rendering of the battlezone in *The Hurt Locker* can be compared to the nineteenth century tradition of the moving panorama, a form which was specifically developed as an alternative to the nineteenth century European static panoramas. The moving panoramic vision is expressed in Bigelow's film through the cinematography and use of fast montage with varying points of view. In contrast to



the static panorama, in which the audience is “in control of the spectacle” and “the visual experience of battle [is organized through]...several vantage points” (Bronfen, 2012, 193), the visuals work in conjunction with the war trauma and battlefield haunting central to the film’s narration. The influence of the panorama paintings on war films is re-written in *The Hurt Locker* to introduce a unique visual code, one chiefly inspired by the American tradition of the moving panorama. As great battles were often the subjects of nineteenth century panorama paintings, a link can be drawn between the historical developments of the panorama painting and the war films of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, one that includes the moving panorama and the visual approach taken in *The Hurt Locker*.



Fig. 5.12. *The October War Panorama* in Cairo, Egypt.



The nineteenth century battle panorama has long been recognized as an influence on war films. To better understand this influence, first consider the impact of a late twentieth century battle panorama. *The October War Panorama* (Fig. 5.12), housed in a museum located at the spot of Anwar Sadat's 1981 assassination, depicts an Egyptian victory over Israeli forces during the October War (Yom Kippur War) of 1973. Built in 1989 by North Korean artists, on Kim Jong Il's suggestion to then president Hosni Mubarak, the museum fails to mention the successful Israeli counteroffensives which followed, as well as the U.N. brokered ceasefire.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, a similar work—the Tishreen Panorama—exists in Damascus, Syria, also built by North Koreans, depicting Syria's participation in the same war much to the same effect. These panoramas essentially rewrite history for Egyptian and Syrian nationalist sensibilities. They both function in a way similar to Paul Philippoteaux's *Gettysburg Cyclorama* (Fig. 5.2). Both old and new war panoramas promise (a selective) verisimilitude based on what Paul Virilio identifies as the link between optics and warfare. "The advance of panoramic telemetry", Virilio writes, "resulted in widescreen cinema" (Virilio, 1984, 69).<sup>11</sup> The influence of nineteenth century panorama vision is present in early war films, such as Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) (in which the American Civil War battle sequences seem as if they could have been lifted straight from Philippoteaux's painting), as well in films from the 1920s which depict combat scenes in epic scale: Abel Gance's *Napoleon* (1927), for example (Fig. 5.13). The panoramic vision is present in the World War II combat film—in films produced during World War II and in later films about that conflict, such as *The Longest Day* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1962) or *Saving Private Ryan* (Dreamworks, 1998)—and thus, through the resulting visual codes, helped to define the "panoramic war film".



Fig. 5.13. Philippoteaux's *Gettysburg Cyclorama* (first), Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (second), *The Longest Day* (third), and *Saving Private Ryan* (fourth).



Fig. 5.14. Mathew Brady's photograph "The Dead of Antietam", displayed in a New York gallery in October 1862, one month after the battle.

In his study of panorama paintings, Stephan Oettermann argues that panoramas were the products of the nineteenth century with no precursors. The development of the panorama was not based on previous developments in the arts but rather on changes in culture (Oettermann, 1997, 5). Though a dubious claim, as the first panoramas appeared in the late eighteenth century and had antecedents in large-scale paintings (Christie, 2011), cultural changes did inform the development of the panoramic form throughout the nineteenth century. For Americans in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the traditional, static, circular panoramas were "visually inadequate to the situation in which they found themselves", as the onset of railroad travel and the end of a war documented through haunting photographs (Fig. 5.14), and as such, the moving panoramas "anticipated, in art, the speed of travel" (Oettermann, 1997, 323). The static panoramas seemed distinctly European to the American viewer and were primarily focused on cities and pastoral landscapes that were familiar to the European viewer. The moving panorama paintings, by contrast, often depicted the rugged

landscapes of the American West, still the primitive unknown in the minds of many eastern city-dwellers. These paintings, moving around a circular rotunda, contained vague or elusive vanishing points, the spectator's vision brought to focus on different points as if an invisible director and editor were present. If the moving panorama was a response to the increasingly irrelevant form of the static panorama, the moving panoramic vision of *The Hurt Locker* can be seen as a similar response to previous war films and changes in visual culture. If the panorama could not have developed without the Industrial Revolution, as Oettermann contends, then the development of Bigelow and Barry Ackroyd's approach to *The Hurt Locker* may be linked to the digital revolution.

Cinematographer Barry Ackroyd addresses the digital revolution, ironically almost, through non-digital means (the use of 16mm cameras). The role which documentaries and Internet videos play in the contemporary audience's relationship with the Iraq War informs this approach. This is due in part to the variety of methods by which we experience the moving image—the multitude of screens we encounter on a daily basis. Writing about large-scale paintings, Ian Christie asks whether “our ability to contemplate such vast acres of canvas with more equanimity [has] something to do with our expanded sense of image scale—from proliferating IMAX cinemas and giant plasma to the miniature screens of our smartphones” (Christie, 2011). The approach taken in *The Hurt Locker* can be described as a moving panorama, the merging of two different cinematic traditions: montage and the moving frame. The moving panorama that is *The Hurt Locker* is a montage of competing gazes through multiple cameras that express their own consciousness, a point to which I shall return later. This new formulation of panoramic vision offers a novel way to analyze the visual score of *The*

*Hurt Locker*, and it extends our understanding of the new logistics of perception in contemporary war films.

Impressed with Barry Ackroyd's near-documentary approach in Paul Greengrass's *United 93* (Fig. 5.15), Bigelow remarked in an article for *Exposure International* that "[he] is a master at evoking the 'you-are-there' immediacy that [*The Hurt Locker*] demanded".<sup>12</sup> Hand-held tracking shots and low-angle shots (Figs. 5.15 and 5.16) are used in both Bigelow and Greengrass's films. Ackroyd, operating four Super 16mm cameras simultaneously, constantly crossing the 180-degree line, and "providing multiple points of view", intended to "make you feel like a participant" while providing the space for the actors to "do long takes with continuous action".<sup>13</sup> A single scene could be captured through a combination of close shots, aerial shots, long shots, and medium shots—few of which are static. The images produce what Giles Deleuze refers to as "camera consciousness": "we are no longer faced with subjective and objective images" but rather a free-floating perception that amounts to an "emancipation of the viewpoint" (Deleuze, 1986, 26). The copious footage from four 16mm cameras provided ample material for editors Chris Innis and Bob Murawski to use in a montage in the creation of the Iraq War zone as a moving panorama.

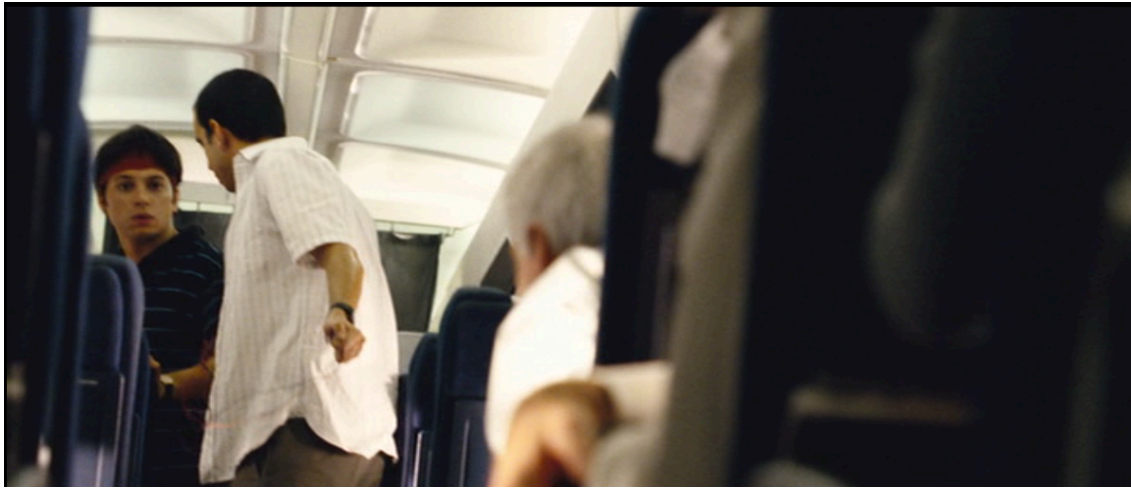


Fig. 5.15. A low-angle shot from *United 93* (Universal, 2006) by cinematographer Barry Ackroyd.



Fig. 5.16. A low-angle shot from *The Hurt Locker* (Lions Gate, 2009) by cinematographer Barry Ackroyd.

As discussed earlier, Walter Murch's editing in *Apocalypse Now* makes extensive use of partial dissolves, juxtaposed frames, and double exposure. By contrast, the editing of *The Hurt Locker*, particularly the bomb-disposal mission scenes, can be characterized as an overtoneal or associational montage: the combination of tonal (cutting based on emotional or thematic content), metric (cutting based on time), and rhythmic (cutting based on both time and image) montage creates a psychologically complex narration—in the case of *The Hurt Locker*, a narrative flow not restricted to the perspective of the protagonists. Consider a series of shots in a sequence described



earlier, in which James disposes of a bomb in the trunk of a car at the U.N. building (Fig. 5.17).

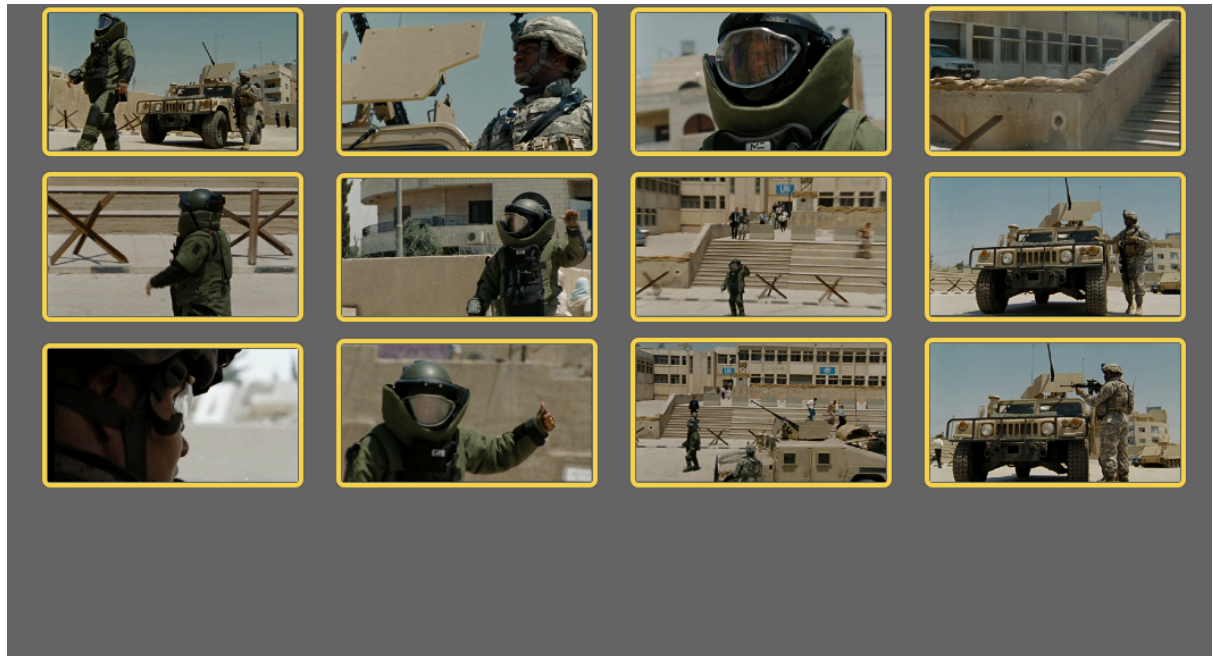


Fig. 5.18. A series of twelve shots (read from left to right) from the “U.N. building bomb disposal” sequence (29:38–30:05) in *The Hurt Locker* (Lions Gate, 2009).

This series of twelve shots lasts approximately twenty-five seconds, covering several different angles and assuming multiple points of view (some of which are unidentified). Each shot is shaky and hand-held, whether it acts as a tracking shot or a static shot. The traditional editing technique of matching on action is abandoned here, as is fidelity to the 180-degree-line rule. The scene proceeds in this manner: the mission is interrupted by a terrorist’s sniper bullet from a balcony across the street and behind the EOD team, witnessed from the sniper’s point of view, the soldiers’ points of view, and undetermined points of view, the frequency of the cuts and the variety of angles and compositions increasing as the tension rises. After the terrorist is killed, tension grows again when it is revealed that the unidentified viewpoint from across the street (third shot from the left in the second row in Fig. 5.17) is from a young Iraqi with a video camera, and the logic (or illogic) which determines the

presentation and combination of shots and angles is again applied further in the sequence (series of shots in Fig. 5.18 below).

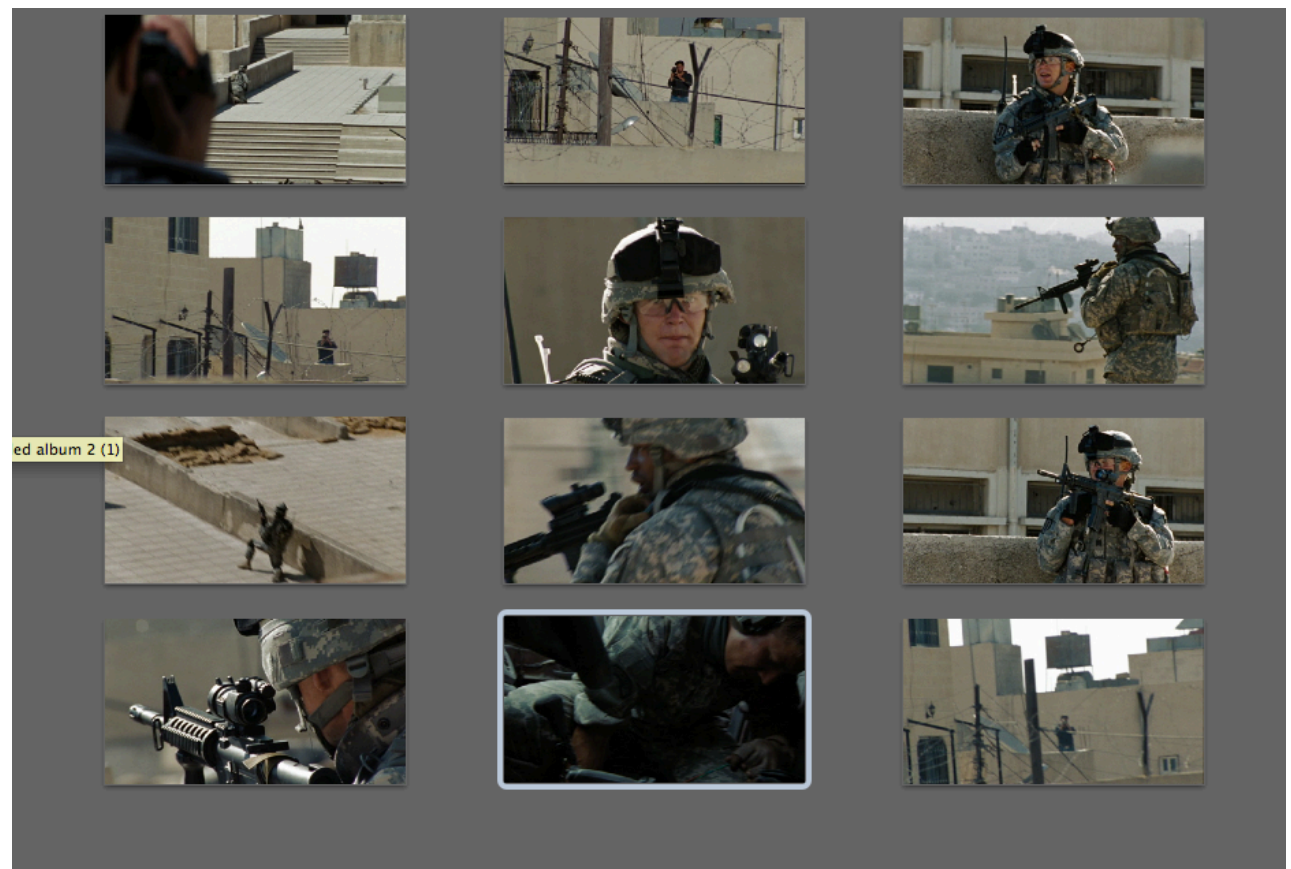


Fig. 5.18. A series of twelve successive shots from the scene (35:40–36:05) in *The Hurt Locker* (Lions Gate, 2009).

The visual approach in *The Hurt Locker* suggests a break with the conventional influence of the panorama on war films, just as the visual approach in *Apocalypse Now* was also a departure from conventional form. Just as Coppola and Storaro wanted to take *Apocalypse Now* beyond the war journalism that invaded American television screens during the Vietnam War, Bigelow sought to distinguish her film from an even broader range of war coverage available to the Iraq War generation. The use of multiple cameras and montage suggests a competition of perspectives, which, in some respects, comments on the contending video and photo journalism of the war itself (Internet videos from soldiers and Iraqi civilians, documentary films, and cable



news coverage, both American and other). This is achieved through the editing scheme of *The Hurt Locker*, which can be compared more effectively to the nineteenth century American tradition of the moving panorama than to the static panorama: the Iraq War battlezone, no matter how familiar it has become to us through other films and media, is rendered uncanny by editing which draws attention to undefined witnesses.

### War as a way of thinking

Coppola's exaggerated portrayal of the battlezone as a haunting, phantasmagorical state and Bigelow's hyper-realistic battlezone, where the camera is a free-floating witness not restricted to the traditionally orchestrated war film experience, mark distinctly different visual approaches to the war film. The phantasmagorical imagery of *Apocalypse Now* offers an original visual representation of war. The otherworldliness of Coppola's Vietnam becomes a haunting hall-of-mirrors for the Western spectator, and the metaphysical journey to the cause of this haunting is aided by Storaro's non-naturalistic colors and Walter Murch's juxtaposed frames, mimicking the magic lantern images of eighteenth and nineteenth century phantasmagoria. The film's narrative running along "the river, the liquid track that keeps the story moving despite [its] episodic interludes", according to Murch, allows the space for the "characters to break the frame" and, by extension, the ghosts of Vietnam as well (Ondaatje, 2002, 56, 70). The result is a Vietnam never seen by the likes of Walter Cronkite or the audiences of *Hearts and Minds* (Peter Davies, 1974), but rather a Vietnam which may only exist in the minds of its traumatized veterans.



Fig. 5.19. A scene from the *Call of Duty* series (above) and Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (Dreamworks, 1998) (below).

*The Hurt Locker* is a war film whose style can be compared to the therapeutic video game *Virtual Iraq* mentioned at the start of this chapter. Unlike other popular war video games, like the *Call of Duty* series, *Virtual Iraq* and *The Hurt Locker* are devoid of the panoramic battlefield landscapes which are manifest in twentieth century war films (Fig. 5.19), nor does *Virtual Iraq* or Bigelow's film make use of the panoramic pathos formula; the spectator of *The Hurt Locker*, and the player of *Virtual Iraq*, are no longer in control of the spectacle. The visual approach in *The Hurt Locker* acts in counterpoint to James's acting-out as a form of self-defense. The theatrical escapism

promised by the rush of battle is a motivation for James, but the cinematography and editing are not in conjunction with this view, and as such, we, the spectators, are dragged along by James through the Iraq War experience with no relief from the encroaching war trauma.

Elizabeth Bronfen notes that in war films “we implicitly take part in cultural haunting” (Bronfen, 2011, 7). Many of the films discussed in previous chapters engage with this cultural haunting, the Vietnam films confronting the ghosts of Vietnam and the Iraq War films anticipating the ghosts of that war which have yet to enact their haunting on American culture. *Apocalypse Now* and *The Hurt Locker* are exceptional cases in this regard, as they offer up the battlezones of American wars as some of the most haunted sites in American history. It is in this approach that the uncanny functions as part of Bigelow and Coppola’s “aesthetic formalization” of this cultural haunting. Rational human logic is subsumed by the otherworldliness of the combat zone (Bronfen, 2011, 7). Where *The Hurt Locker* and *Apocalypse Now* also converge in this respect is in their presentation of warfare, not as a place of battlefields (a series of towns to be conquered, fortresses to be overtaken, beaches to be stormed, etc.), but rather a state of mind (or battlezone) in which the mind is invaded by a primitive warrior code. If the evolution of the war film is marked by addressing “war as a way of seeing”, as Virilio remarked, then *Apocalypse Now* and *The Hurt Locker* delve deeper in their search for new modes of analyzing the impact of war: war, in these films, is a way of thinking, and the cultural haunting produced by war plays a formative role in shaping this way of thinking.

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**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=51297>

<sup>2</sup> [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-03-05/opinion/milius.war.movies\\_1\\_hurt-locker-war-movies-apocalypse?\\_s=PM:OPINION](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-03-05/opinion/milius.war.movies_1_hurt-locker-war-movies-apocalypse?_s=PM:OPINION)

<sup>3</sup> See Jonathan Rosenbaum's review of *The Hurt Locker*:

<http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.com/?p=16094>

<sup>4</sup> Although *Apocalypse Now*, to some extent, shares this influence with *The Hurt Locker*—Coppola noted that Eugene Jones's Vietnam War documentary *A Face of War* (1968) was an inspiration for many sequences in *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, 2001)—Coppola's film diverges from the documentary's promise of verisimilitude and instead uses surreal imagery to engage with war trauma.

<sup>5</sup> The notion of *The Hurt Locker* returning "the body" to the war film genre (as well as the war film being a "body genre") is explained well in Robert Burgoyne's essay "The Hurt Locker: Abstraction and Embodiment in the War Film" (currently unpublished, available online).

<sup>6</sup> An article for MSNBC reported the use of Sophocles's plays at therapy for PTSD. In *Ajax*, for example, the titular character's wife, Tecmessa, describes her husband's post-war countenance as a "thousand-yard-stare". "Marines Turn to Greek Plays to Cope With Stress". MSNBC News. August 14, 2008. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26203463/>

<sup>7</sup> The traumatised soldier, according to the American Psychiatric Association, re-experiences in "one (or more) of the following ways: 1) distressing recollections of the event, 2) distressing dreams of the event, 3) acting or feeling as if the event were re-occurring, 4) psychological distress at exposure to cues that symbolise or resemble the event, or 5) psychological reactivity to the cues that resemble an aspect of the event" (Glanz, 2008, 8–9).

<sup>8</sup> Francis Ford Coppola. *Apocalypse Now: Redux*. Director's Commentary track. United Artists, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> The ending described can be found in *Apocalypse Now: Redux* and on DVD versions of the original theatrical release; they do not include images of Kurtz's compound exploding, which were contained in some of the original 35mm prints.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/egypt/cairo/sights/museum/october-war-panorama>

<sup>11</sup> For further information on war technology and the advent of widescreen, see Giles Taylor's "Roller Coaster Ride: The Widescreen Trick Film and Embodiment", featured in *Big Screens, Little Boxes: The Aesthetics and Culture of Film Style*, PhD thesis in progress

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.fujifilm.com/products/motion\\_picture/exposure/pdf/vol18\\_The\\_Hurt\\_Locker.pdf](http://www.fujifilm.com/products/motion_picture/exposure/pdf/vol18_The_Hurt_Locker.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

Two articles, appearing in the latter half of the last decade, may, in part, explain the motivation behind pairing Vietnam War films with post-9/11 war films in this thesis. Peter Biskind's article, "The Vietnam Oscars", appearing in the March 2008 issue of *Vanity Fair*, and Richard Corliss's 2006 *Time* article, "Where are the War Movies?" Corliss's article, published a year before *Redacted* and seeking to account for the lack of Iraq War films, makes premature claims that "movies mean less than they did" at the time of the Vietnam War and that the Iraq War has not "touched" Americans in the same ways as Vietnam did (Corliss, 2006). Biskind's article chronicles the production histories of Hal Ashby's *Coming Home* and Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*, and closes with the argument that these two films "retain the power to provoke and divide," as "Vietnam remains an open wound", even amidst U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan (Biskind, 2008). Before I began this project, I could see that a conversation was already beginning. Both articles appear to suggest that the effectiveness of films concerning the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars would be measured against the Vietnam War films and earlier war films. In writing a thesis on contemporary American war films, I found it necessary to engage with this conversation, as it provided the opportunity to challenge hasty observations about the new war films and, hopefully, offer new ways of looking at contemporary war films and the war film in general.

Two critical questions confronted me at the outset. The first concerned the necessity of pairing post-9/11 war films with Vietnam War films. Are post-9/11 war films merely a continuation of the war film genre codes that developed during the 1990s, or

has the nature of the conflicts taking place at the time of their release demanded a more explicit connection to the Vietnam War films? In this thesis, I have answered yes to both. Contemporary war films do elaborate upon the visual and narrative modes that appeared in the war films of the 1990s, while at the same time the new war films contend with the Vietnam War films, as the Vietnam War itself has been used to frame critiques of post-9/11 conflicts. The second question I sought to address was why perform such a comparative analysis at all when post-9/11 war films are so manifestly different? It is precisely these differences that warranted this approach. Though the divide in public opinion on the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars echoes the political divide during the Vietnam War, the differences in war representation and contemporary film culture placed these new films in need of an intellectual framework by which to explain their genesis and orientation. When I began this project, many scholars were already categorizing and characterizing these new war films (Garrett Stewart, Robert Burgoyne, Robert Eberwein, Elisabeth Bronfen, and Martin Barker, to name just a few). By using the Vietnam War films to highlight the differences found in post-9/11 war films, I could join other scholars in this discussion and bring new ideas and approaches to the conversation.

In this thesis, I have explored several themes, present in the films I have analyzed, which underscore the revisions made to the war film genre code. These themes include the war film as a vehicle for explicit protest and dissent, the American social landscape reshaped by war and its returning, traumatized veterans, the reconsideration of ethnic and national identity, the use of visual ideas drawn from pre-cinematic modes of representation, and the role of first-person narration in war representation. As demonstrated in previous chapters, these themes have, I argue, contributed to the revision of five attributes of the war film, which have persisted from early cinema

until the present day. First, the war film is a product of the symbiotic relationship between war technology and representational modes. Second, the war film constantly re-invents itself through genre memory. Third, the war film brings into relief a discourse on national identity. Fourth, the war film explores the effect of war on the human psyche by presenting the battlezone as a haunted site; and fifth, the war film writes a visceral history of war—one that contends with or contributes to other offered histories.

American war films of the twenty-first century exhibit many of these attributes. Although genre memory is a defining factor of each of the contemporary war films I have analyzed, one can also find in varying degrees a new logistics of perception, a new style informed by the digital technology used to wage war and report it, as shown in chapter one, trauma and memory conveyed through haunting, and dialogue on the national narrative. Each film also attempts to write a chapter in the amassing of histories concerning U.S. involvement in conflict, some of these stories taking place on battlefields and others concerned with the lives of soldiers off the battlefield.

The war film is a product of the symbiotic relationship between war technology and representational modes

One of the earliest problems that I encountered in my research was providing a suitable critique of the representational modes found in contemporary war films, new visual codes that are quite pronounced in films such as *Redacted*, *In the Valley of Elah*, and *The Hurt Locker*. Reading these texts alongside the work of Friedrich Kittler and Paul Virilio was essential for addressing this issue. Kittler wrote that the history of the motion picture camera “coincides with the history of automatic

weapons” (Kittler, 1986, 124), taking his cue from Paul Virilio’s observation that there is “no war without representation” and that weapons are “tools not just of destruction but of perception” (Virilio, 1984, 6). So how can one apply Kittler and Virilio to a new wave of war cinema permeated by digital images and near-documentary approaches? What debates have emerged in the wake of war films from the previous decade? In my second chapter, concerning Brian De Palma’s Vietnam War film *Casualties of War* (1989) and his Iraq War film *Redacted* (2007), I fleshed out two opposing views on the effectiveness of the visual codes which emerged in contemporary war cinema around the middle of the last decade, one view held by Patricia Pisters and another offered by Garrett Stewart.

Films like *Redacted*, according to Patricia Pisters, stand alongside Baudrillard in denouncing the presentation of “virtual war[s] without human targets” (Pisters, 2010, 238). The influence of war technology upon cinematic representations of war, as highlighted by the works of Virilio and Kittler, she argues, does not actually strip war cinema of the human agency, which has been a feature of war films since the silent era. Rather, the logistics of perception in war, both in waging war and in representing it, is turned on its head to humanize the war experience and to provide a critique of the war (Fig. 1). Pisters’ view is that twentieth century war cinema, in particular the Iraq War films, constitutes a “Logistics of Perception 2.0”. To me, this appears to be a natural cycle, re-occurring at various points in the history of the war film. The new logistics of perception which Pisters identifies in the Iraq War films is genre memory operating as it did since early cinema, using the generic resources which have been made available (Bakhtin) and employing filmmaking techniques shaped by war technology (Kittler and Virilio).





Fig. 1. (Left) Captain Benjamin Willard filmed by a documentary film crew in *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, United Artists, 1979); (right) Private Angel Salazar filming his own documentary, “Tell Me No Lies”, while being filmed by Sergeant Lawyer McCoy in *Redacted* (Brian De Palma, Magnolia Pictures, 2007).

Garrett Stewart argues that the use of digital technology in framing the action feels cumbersome rather than minimalist. The “very programming of the genre”, according to Garrett Stewart, “may seem to have crashed—and in part from the electronic overload at the plot level itself” (Stewart, 2009, 47). The result are contemporary war films that feel just as staged as previous war films and contemporary mainstream media, what Stewart terms “digital fatigue”. This is an irony when one considers that the aim of this new representational mode is to contest previous war cinema and mainstream media coverage. The term ‘digital fatigue’ can be read as an allusion to ‘compassion fatigue’, a critique of this new logistics of perception coupled with a critique of how modern war is conducted (i.e., drone attacks, satellite targeting, depleted uranium).

I would like to offer an additional reading of the term “digital fatigue” and how it pertains to contemporary war cinema. ‘Fatigue’ can also imply a soldier’s combat fatigue (uniform). Digital technology is not only being used to wage war and represent it, but also being used by soldiers to carve out a soldier identity. Twenty-first century American war cinema appears to acknowledge that the post-9/11 era is the first time in history when the soldier is literally a filmmaker, and how the soldiers distinguish themselves as individuals can be based on how they film themselves

(further entrenching the idea of the soldier as an alternate historian, an idea I proposed in the first chapter). Increased access to digital motion picture cameras by the public at large, cheaper, lighter, and easily portable, has replaced the traditional soldier diary and epistolary tradition, and recast the soldier as a documentarian of his own war (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. “This is the first footage shot with my new camera. I broke my other one right after we left Afghanistan last year. I think there was too much dust in there. This is actually my fourth video camera since I became a marine”. – Mike Scotti in Kristian Farga’s documentary *This is War* (G2 Pictures, 2010).

This new logistics of perception has continued through contemporary war cinema, with Paul Greengrass’s *Green Zone* (Studio Canal, 2010) being a notable example. In *Green Zone*, cinematographer Barry Ackroyd continues his portrayal of the war film as a moving panorama, a style which he perfected in *The Hurt Locker*: Ackroyd’s camera movements and compositions mimic the soldier’s ‘home movie’, evoking the approach featured in *Redacted*. The visuals in *Green Zone* contain shaky camera movements, crossing of the 180-degree line, jump cuts, and zooms which call attention to themselves. The characterization of digital fatigue which I propose is also present in Greengrass’s film, soldiers are shown filming the streets of Baghdad from

within their Humvees. While other aspects of contemporary war films are featured in *Green Zone*, for example the trope of haunting and the American exceptionalism debate, the film is a notable entry in the post-9/11 war film canon owing to its explicit continuation of a new logistics of perception which emerged earlier in the decade.

The war film constantly re-invents itself through genre memory

I concur with Geoffrey Klingsporn's addendum to Paul Virilio's view that "there is no war...without representation". Klingsporn takes Virilio further back before World War I to the American Civil War, citing the importance of battlefield photographs, thought to have been lost after the war, which re-emerged during the 1890s, thereby coinciding with early cinema (Klingsporn, 2006, 33). In the first chapter, I proposed the Civil War as a conflict which provided the blueprints for the war film, as it was the site where Napoleonic tactics gruesomely collided with technological innovation. Civil War historian Shelby Foote argues that the Civil War was a rehearsal for World War I and the conflicts which followed, as shown by the use of trench warfare, Gatling guns, repeating rifles, and troop deployment by train (Burns, 1990). The soldier diaries which survived the war can be read as a template for the narration found in both twentieth and twenty-first century war films, also evidenced in chapter one. It is important, therefore, for scholarship on the war film to take into consideration the importance of the American Civil War in the construction and evolution of war films through genre memory.

Mikhail Bakhtin understood texts to have a genre memory, one which "communicates and accumulates a history" (Morson & Emerson, 1990). The contemporary war films discussed in this thesis are both the sum of the parts of previous war films and the

products of new representational modes. War cinema is always in dialogue with previous films and other art forms, even if the purpose of the dialogue is to critique these past forms in order to make a statement about recent events.

*Redacted* proved to be a suitable film for my second chapter on the evolution of visual codes, as it was quite clear which text provided much of the film's genre memory. Brian De Palma's Vietnam War film *Casualties of War*, a film with a storyline similar to that of *Redacted*, as well as similar criticisms of U.S. foreign policy. As demonstrated in this chapter, *Casualties of War* is visually coded in a style which arose in the New American Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Its critique of American militarism is also rooted in the politics found in films from the same era. In *Redacted*, De Palma retains the polemical charge of his Vietnam War film, but speaks through a new logistics of perception, documentary filmmaking, Internet videos, and soldier video diaries.

*In the Valley of Elah* is another film which uses the new logistics of perception (or digital fatigue) to serve its critique of U.S. foreign policy. Haggis's film, like many previous war films, brings the war to the home front in order to exhibit the ways in which wars fought on foreign soil re-shape the domestic social order, in this case using a murder mystery in the American southwest to mirror the trauma experienced by soldiers in Iraq. While the police procedural drama clearly plays a role in shaping Haggis's film, previous war films set (predominantly) in the American homeland are also evoked to serve *In the Valley of Elah*'s critique of the Iraq War. Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*, Hal Ashby's *Coming Home*, and William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* are films that readily come to mind and provided good points of comparison in chapter three. The role of genre memory in the 'veteran film' can be

taken further back to D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, as the latter half of Griffith's film is concerned with Civil War veterans trying to rebuild their lives in the wake of the war during Reconstruction. Other examples from contemporary war cinema of films that are concerned with soldiers returning to a civilian life that eludes them include Jim Sheridan's *Brothers* (2009) and Kimberly Peirce's *Stop Loss* (2008); both films attempt to address issues surrounding traumatized veterans and an American homeland simultaneously altered by war and the soldiers' absence.

Genre memory is employed in *Flags of Our Fathers* through evocations of previous war films. The visual codes of *Saving Private Ryan*—hand-held cinematography, desaturated film stock, and the under-cranked cameras—are present in *Flags of Our Fathers* (and *Letters from Iwo Jima*, incidentally). By evoking the film forms found in Spielberg's war film, Eastwood provides the audience with a familiar reference point in his re-imaging of World War II combat, while simultaneously providing a new analysis of past events rooted in post-9/11 discourse.

In the first and final chapter, I showed that the influence of nineteenth century representational modes are manifest in both *The Hurt Locker* and *Restrepo*. Although *The Hurt Locker* contains echoes of Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, the nineteenth century moving panorama form provided a template for Bigelow to create a contemporary war film which distinguishes itself from previous war films whose battlefields were influenced by panoramic vision. *Restrepo* uses elements found in Civil War soldier diaries, despite also sharing some characteristics with contemporary war documentaries and digital-fatigue films. It is through these two films that the importance of pre-cinema modes of re-imagining combat and its relation to genre memory are the most clear.

The war film brings into relief a discourse on national identity

The war film is a unique site for exploring competing national narratives, as war itself intensifies popular social nationalisms (Smith, 2001, 120). Much of American war cinema can be viewed as a hegemonic nationalist discourse par excellence, although there are some films that appear to acknowledge multiple forms of nationalism within a broad American narrative. The post-9/11 era intensified contending forms of American nationalism, exemplified in the debate over American exceptionalism, and the American war film serves as a privileged site to see this discourse play out. Many pre-9/11 war films, in particular Vietnam War films, appear to be attuned to the discourse between these competing national narratives. Robert Burgoyne argues that Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* reconciles the sentiments expressed in the pre-Vietnam war film and the post-Vietnam war film, on the grounds that the film "reinvigorated the genre codes and conventions of the war films of the past" while departing "from the heroic conventions of the war film...dramatizing the psychology of cowardice in battle, with no redemptive heroic action at the end" (Burgoyne, 2008, 50). *Saving Private Ryan* can be read as a moderator between ideas of war and national identity set out previously by *Hamburger Hill* and later by *Flags of Our Fathers*. It acknowledges the notions of nationalism articulated by pre-Vietnam war films and the counter-arguments found in Vietnam War films.

The war film explores the effect of war on the human psyche by presenting the battlezone as a haunted site

Whilst not discussed in chapter three, a link exists between veteran films, such as *In the Valley of Elah*, and war films with explicit elements of haunting, such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Apocalypse Now*, and *The Hurt Locker*. The veteran, according to Elisabeth Bronfen, never fully returns home, even if he survives the war, a part of his being still remains abroad, forever haunting the battlefield (Bronfen, 2012, 233). The concept of battlefield haunting has been, and remains, an essential component of the war film, as it renders real-world notions of trauma into poetic meditation. Newly understood symptoms of PTSD have been understood through aesthetic forms and literary tropes pertaining to the supernatural. This cinematic form enables the traumatic effects of battle to be conveyed viscerally and to adopt a deeper cultural meaning than what is implied by war reportage.

The appearance of the uncanny on the battlefield contributes to the presentation of the battlezone as a haunted site. As shown in chapter five, the uncanny is prevalent in *Apocalypse Now* and *The Hurt Locker*, but other contemporary war films have also made use of the uncanny to underscore the haunting nature of combat memories. For example, Spike Lee's *Miracle at St. Anna* (Touchstone Pictures, 2008) articulates the memories of an African American World War II veteran as battlefield ghosts. Haunting in Lee's film is evoked through uncanny occurrences (or miracles). A character is seen to resemble a mythological mountain in the Tuscan countryside (the character of Train as "the Sleeping Giant") and the memory of the massacre at St. Anna di Stazzema (a real-life Nazi atrocity in which over five hundred Italian civilians were gunned down by the SS) is encapsulated in the trauma of a young boy (the thousand-yard-stare). The battlefield ghosts in Lee's film work in conjunction

with the film's discourse on war and American exceptionalism—a rejoinder of sorts to Clint Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers*.

### The war film writes a visceral history of war

In the historical film, the filmmaker acts as a historian of sorts. Robert Rosenstone contests the notion previously put forward by historians that the historical film is simply a work of art and entertainment. Historical consciousness has risen alongside advancements in visual media (Rosenstone, 2006, 12). The orientation of the war film and its narrative capacities have also expanded alongside advances in visual media, and this has influenced both how war films write history and the histories they write. One of the challenges facing contemporary war films, however, is that cinema is no longer the dominant medium for experiencing war images, whether re-staged or presented in unadulterated form. The rise of digital media and Internet videos has had implications for both the war film and cinema in general. Not only have new narrative forms and representational modes arisen, but the means for inscribing history through film have changed as well.

### What do these films teach us?

So what do the Vietnam War films and contemporary war films teach us? War films, regardless of their historical context, employ genre memory. As shown in this thesis, the visual construction and narration of war films are not only informed by previous war films but also by pre-cinematic modes of war representation. War films also engage with an American war mythology, regardless of their political orientation. Many war films either contest or affirm the dominant myths of American history, and some, such as *Flags of Our Fathers*, do both. There is also an undeniable link



between how war is waged and how it is represented. The observations of Paul Virilio and Friedrich Kittler are extremely relevant to the discussion of war films of the twenty-first century. Additionally, the presentation of the battle zone as a haunted site continues as an effective means of portraying war trauma and the memory of war. Whether the ghosts of war stalk the streets of Baghdad, Vietnam's Nung River, the blue-collar town of Clairton, Pennsylvania, or the New Mexican desert, they serve to remind the viewer of "war's unfinished business" (Bronfen, 2012, 30). Lastly, the war film acts as an alternative history. Filmmakers have, since early cinema, used film to bring to audiences the war not written about in newspapers or books or seen on the nightly news. The war film finds its strength not in a quest for historical truth but in a quest for emotional truth, and the post-9/11 war film continues this tradition.

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